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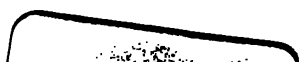
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# STEVEN LAWRENCE,

*Heoman.*

BY MRS. EDWARDS,

*AUTHOR OF*

"ARCHIE LOVELL," "THE MORALS OF MAY FAIR,"

ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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# STEVEN LAWRENCE, YEOMAN.

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## CHAPTER I.

A STORY WITHOUT A MORAL.

“A FAIR face, Klaus,” said Steven Lawrence, thoughtfully—“a face that might well tempt a man to give up the wilderness, forget his gun and his comrade, and all the old landmarks of his life!” And, as he spoke, the yeoman took Miss Fane’s photograph from his breast again; and, holding it up before his eyes, examined it long and critically in the fast-sinking sunset light.

Sunset in the tropics: sunset on the outskirts of a Mexican forest—stately, solemn, unruffled by man, as in the days when Cortes and his band first marched, silent with wonder, through the flowering woods and golden sierras of the land that they had come to

conquer! What a chaos of noble colour, what an Eden of blossom and of odour, what royal prodigality of untrammelled life was around Steven in this moment when he resolved to discard his fond mistress, Nature, and return to the larger cares, the scantier pleasure of civilization! The spot where the hunters had encamped themselves for the night was at the height of some three or four thousand feet above the level of the sea, and a glowing sweep of lowland country—yellow maize fields and towering maguey intermingling with orchards, villages, and gardens—stretched away, league beyond league, before them, until it broke into blue haze at the foot of the snow-capped range of distant Cordilleras. On one hand, bordering the narrow path or deer track along which the hunters had travelled, a dense undergrowth of cactus and prickly pear, matted together with wild rose, honeysuckle, and flowering vine, formed an impenetrable barrier to the forest; on the other, through tangled arches over-roofed by bamboo and palm, by glossy-leaved banana or drooping boughs of the white-blossomed dogwood, could be caught long vistas of woodland shade; the turf ankle-deep in verbena, white and purple iris, and a thousand exotic orchids



of nameless hues and beauty. Aloes, with their candelabra-like spikes of bloom; tree ferns in all the marvellous grace of their giant fronds; orange and red gladioli; and a very wilderness of rope-plants, passion flowers and lycopodiums clothed the ground to the verge of a ravine which, at seventy or eighty feet distant, fell abruptly into the valley. The soft west wind was laden to intoxication with odour. Myrtle, citron, and peach groves; the milk-white datura; the waxen flowers of the plant which the Indians, in their language, call, "Flower of the Heart," all lent their sweetness to the voluptuous incense of the hour: while (as if no sense should be left unconquered) a solitary mocking-bird, close at hand beside the hunters' camp, filled the whole forest-side with the echoes of her plaintive and most musical mimicry.

And to all this wealth of nature by which he was surrounded—to forest and valley, smiling lowland and distant mountain—Steven Lawrence was insensible. His heart was away—away by a low white homestead on a bleak sea-shore: a Kentish homestead with cool winds blowing from the sea, a grey sky over head, and the fresh, wild smell from seaweed on the beach mingling with the

homely sweetness of wall-flowers and budding lilacs along the garden-walks. Steven Lawrence's heart was in the home where he had not been since he was a boy—the home whose hearth he had forsaken in his boyish jealousy, and on which the fire of a stranger burnt now. Home! What were perfume-laden winds, fruits and flowers chasing each other in unbroken succession throughout the months—what was all this affluence of alien colour and sound and odour compared to the magic of that short word?

It was mid-April, and he could picture to himself how the old farm, every field, every rood in every field, of which he knew, must look. The young corn sprinkling its tender verdure athwart the fallows; the potatoes showing their dusky ridges on the southern hill-side; the whitening orchard with the daffodils in the grass; the copse, where the wood-pigeons must be building, and the larch and maple putting forth their glistening buds; the bare wych-elm and the sallow willows by the brook—he could see it all!—minutely, vividly, as only a man to whom Nature is the great passionate reality of life ever sees opening buds, and whitening orchards, and early-tinted fallows! Was the five-acres sowed with wheat or barley this year? he won-

dered; and was the Vicar's Close (never, from time immemorial, belonging to any member of the Established Church) kept pasture still? He could hear the lowing of the cattle as they came home along the sandy sea-ward road at milking-time; could mark the lazy neap-tide crawling in midway across the sands; could see the light of a wood fire blazing cheerfully through the bay-window of the farm-parlour; could see the white cloth spread; himself coming home, tired, from his day's work, along the garden walk and in the porch;—but now imagination, not memory, worked, and the picture grew less distinct; in the porch a slender girlish figure, a tender smile upon a beautiful mouth, two little hands outstretched to clasp his neck, and then . . . Steven Lawrence gave a great sigh, came back with a start to Mexico again, and found the face of which he dreamed smiling to him from the bit of cardboard in his hands.

“A fair face,” he repeated once more and aloud. “If such things were at all in your way, Klaus, I would ask you to take a look at it before you help me with your advice.”

“Advice!” repeated a deep voice, slowly—a voice in which, although more than twenty years had been passed away from the

fatherland, the good old German gutturals were grafted, with an effect which I shall not attempt to reproduce, upon a broad New England accent. "A man of your age, in love, to ask advice of a man of mine! Give me the picture, Steven, and I shall say all that you want me to say of it—an angel face, myosotis eyes, rose-and-milk skin, a pair of lips like cherries—everything that a man in love would have his mistress possess, but advice—no! Advice between friends should be the result of reason, and love, from the beginning of it to the end, is a passion by its very nature divorced from reason. If I advised at all—*gehe!*—let me see her! When you are away from me I would like, anyhow, to know the exact form in which your per—your happiness, Steven, your happiness, was accomplished."

And old Klaus stretched out his brown sinewy hand—a hand not much accustomed to handle ware so frail—and took the little vignette photograph over which Steven Lawrence was still intently poring.

As he held it in silent scrutiny for some moments, a flood of orange light, the transient after-glow of the tropics, fell suddenly across the clearing where the old German and Steven had encamped for the night, and

set forth in clearest relief the figures of the two men—of the man who had lived and loved, and whose tired heart knew the worth of both possessions, and the man before whose hopes life and love lay outstretched in gilded perspective still, and whose strong heart leaped with passion as he looked forward to his own share in both. What a contrast outwardly between the two! How easy for one to hold love and beauty so cheap; how natural for the other to consider them as purest gold! What could poor old Klaus—at this moment the thought struck Steven—what could a man like this have ever known of love? At five and twenty could that hard grey face of his have been young? Could any woman have kissed his lips with love? Could he ever, save out of musty German books, have learnt the crude philosophy which had turned all one side of his honest, sterling heart to gall?

Klaus is a big-made, ridiculously angular man; tall in reality, but not looking so, from the disproportionate size of his hands and feet, and the awkward, crane-like fashion in which his head is set upon a pair of sloping shoulders. His face is a wonderful face: the skin tanned, freckled, and lined to an extent that makes his own statement of



having been "lily fair" when he was a boy, the most wildly incredible of all Klaus's stories: the high, projecting forehead seamed with furrows; the pale blue eyes deep set, void of any perceptible eyebrow or eyelash and with that peculiar half-scowling expression in them common to men whose lives have been spent, whether on sea or land, in confronting sun and wind and storm unsheltered. No vestige of hair is to be seen on his upper lip or chin, and this peculiarity alone, in a life where every man goes bearded, gives something weird to the expression of the poor old fellow's face—an expression heightened by his thin, keen-cut nose, always carried aloof, as he says of himself, like a fox's in search of prey, and the hard compressed lips rarely parted, save twice in the twenty-four hours to eat, or, almost more rarely still, to speak. A sparse tuft of hair, of a wan, clay colour, clothes the extreme top of Klaus's skull: the forehead, the temples, the back region of the head, are perfectly bare. "My hair has too often come off after jungle fever to offer to grow again now," he explains sometimes. "I have just enough left to be scalped by, when those *verfluchte* Indians get hold of me at last. Could the finest lovelocks that

ever grew serve the purpose better ?” Such is Klaus’s exterior.

Steven Lawrence is an Englishman of seven or eight and twenty, Saxon-looking in the extreme, even in Indian mocassins, red flannel shirt, and Mexican sombrero. Of his face, inasmuch as the feature which gives the key-note to the rest is masked by beard, all I shall say here is that he has a broad smooth forehead whose fairness contrasts quaintly with the sienna brown of his sunburnt cheeks ; crisp dark hair growing low upon the temples, as you may have seen in a tapestried portrait of Henri Quatre in the Louvre ; a nose somewhat too short to belong to the aristocratic British type, but clean cut as a statue’s, and forming in profile an unbroken line from the forehead ; gleaming white teeth that show, in spite of the beard, whenever he speaks or smiles, and a pair of well-opened resolute blue eyes. You could hardly look into his face and doubt that he possessed, at least, a manly mouth and chin. Nature surely would not commit the anomaly of allying positive weakness with that sturdy head, those bold blue eyes of his. But what of intellectual, what of moral strength ? I pause until I can bring poor Steven before you, shorn,

to answer that question. He is stalwart and tall, over six feet in mocassins, broad chested, lithe of limb, thoroughly, unconsciously graceful, as only human creatures who have lived, as he has, an unfettered, half-savage life can ever be now-a-days. As he lies outstretched upon the turf—his rifle at his side, his handsome face, half in shadow, half lit up by this orange glow, as he turns it round to his companion—he looks for very certain a man: a man whose physical proportions a Greek sculptor of old would not have disdained as a model. The well-set, crisp-curved head; the broad, low forehead; the level glance of eye, the throat, the limbs, might all have belonged to the race among whom the gods dwelt; and of mind, of soul—well, with the eager expression that his features wear just now, there is enough even of these upon the yeoman's face, perhaps, for a Greek.

Easy to imagine, I repeat, that the love and beauty poor old Klaus holds so cheap would be considered by Steven Lawrence, in this fresh spring-time of his manhood, as the purest gold!

“The face is a handsome one, Steven: no doubt concerning that much: the face is a handsome one. As the picture is uncoloured,

I'm disqualified of course from speaking of the rose-and-lily skin, the myosotis eyes, but——”

“But the expression of the face?” interrupted Steven Lawrence impatiently, as he took back the photograph from Klaus's hand. “What do I care for roses and lilies, and myo— hang it all! what do I care for a market-gardener's list of beauties, when I am speaking of a woman's face—a woman's face that I love? I may say it, though I haven't seen her for near upon a dozen years. The eyes may be black, or blue, or brown, I will swear they are eyes that could love: the lips may be rosy-red or not—they are lips that could speak brave words, and give a man brave kisses, and if I can win them they shall be mine! Now, Klaus, I have spoken out the plain truth to you at last.” And he took another fond look at the photograph, then put it carefully within a letter—a letter well worn and creased, as if it had been read and re-read, and hid it away again within his breast.

Without answering a word the old German rose, his rifle in his hand, and walked off to examine the stakes of the two little mustang horses that, at twenty or thirty yards distance, were tethered out to graze. He then carefully,

and with a master hand, turned the savoury haunch of venison that was roasting for their evening meal across the embers of a clear wood fire; finally took out a pouch of tobacco from his pocket, twisted up a cigarito, lit it, and came back to Steven's side. In the five minutes that had elapsed since he went away, the tropical after-glow had faded into night. Already a white full moon was shining behind the crest of the opposite palm-covered hills; already great Orion was saluting the Southern Cross through the transparent ether. The thickets were sparkling with fire-flies; the cardinals and mocking birds were hushed; the toll of the campanero alone resounded, plaintive and clear, like an Old World village bell, through the forest.

"The haunch is browning to a turn, Steven, and smells good exceedingly," said old Klaus. "Have you an appetite to-night?"

"Have I not!" answered Steven, heartily. "I was just thinking, as you came back, Klaus, that my hunger was prodigious. We haven't eaten since a little past sunrise, and then, to speak honestly, I was ill-satisfied: three partridges, a quail, and a dozen of pheasant eggs isn't over much of a breakfast be-

tween two men like you and me. How long will it be, do you think, before the food is ready?"

"A quarter of an hour," said Klaus; "time for my cigarito, and for the advice which you may remember I have not given you yet. Do I advise you to make your way across to Tampico, or go down straight away to Vera Cruz? That's about what you want me to talk to you of, Steven, isn't it?"

"Klaus," answered the Englishman, "one thing is certain: sooner or later I *must* return to the old country; not, as you will say, because of this fancy for a woman's face—if Dora Fane had never written to me or sent me her picture at all, I must go back just the same. This life of ours—well, no man knows better than you how well the life suits me. I've no education; I haven't I suppose, what men in cities call brains; and a year ago I should have laughed at any man who had told me I should give up deer-stalking and quail-shooting for the old English life, the plough and the harrow, the sewing and the reaping, from which I ran away when I was a boy. Money perhaps, Klaus, quite as much as love, if I speak the truth, is what takes me back. While my uncle lived, while young Josh held the farm, and while I was a

beggar, I loathed the thought of the dull village life, the daily farm work, the comfortable old house, the place in the meeting-house, from which the lad's inopportune legitimacy had ousted me. Now that I know these things are mine, that three or four hundred of good sovereigns are to be made a year out of my own land, if I return and put my shoulder (as the shoulders of all my forefathers have been) to the plough, I begin to think my duty lies there, on my own bit of land, and that the old village-monotony, meeting-house and all, is what I was born and intended for."

"Even without the *myosotis*—" began Klaus, holding his cigarito between his fingers, and looking full at Steven's face.

"Even without a woman being mixed up in it at all," interrupted Steven, quickly. "And if *my-o-so-tis* means blue——, as I suppose, you're wrong altogether. Dora Fane, to the best of my recollection, had eyes like sloes."

"Never," said the old German, decisively. "On that point I am certain, my friend. The woman from whom that photograph was taken had never black eyes. Brown, possibly, or hazel, or any shade of blue you choose, but black—never! Are you sure,

now, you are in love with the right woman, Steven?" he added. "How many years is it since you saw this Dora last? Are you certain you'd know her if you met her in the streets of Vera Cruz next week?"

"I should know the woman from whom this photograph was taken if I met her anywhere," answered Steven, promptly. "Of Dora Fane, as she used to be—well, if you bring me to exact facts, of Dora Fane as she used to be, my recollections are just about as confused as possible. I was eighteen when I left home, and she, by Jove! Klaus, she was within a year, for certain, of my own age."

"Which makes her now?"

"Seven and twenty, at least! Is it possible—and the picture would give you the idea of a woman in her first prime, twenty at the outside! Well, never mind; she'll be a better mate for me—fitter for the sort of life she'll have to lead as my wife. I never thought of her as that kind of age, though! Eighteen—well, say she was two years younger, which she wasn't, than me—sixteen and ten would be twenty-six, at the youngest. I'm pleased you understand, Klaus, pleased that it should be so. An experienced woman of six and twenty knows better how to love than a flighty girl of eighteen; still I never did



think of Dora Fane before as of that kind of age, I must confess."

"And there was some sort of love-making going on between you, young as you were, Steven? Before you left home, you and the girl had looked upon each other like sweet-hearts, I suppose, already?"

"Not exactly," said Steven, after remaining silent for a minute or two, while he ransacked his memory; "indeed, I can't positively say I ever spoke to her a dozen times in my life. Dora, as I have told you, was a poor relation and dependent of the Squire's, half play-mate, half governess, of little Katharine Fane, his step-daughter; and—well, as far as I recollect, not averse to the attentions of the different young men about the neighbourhood. There was young Hoskins, the doctor, I know; and Smith, the curate, used to meet her when she walked out with the child; not to speak of myself, whom of course she only noticed when there was no better fellow by, and ——"

"Young Hoskins, and the curate, and you, when there was no better fellow by!" exclaimed Klaus, flinging away the end of his cigarito. 28  
"And of *this* woman—this woman who, a dozen years ago, carried on love affairs by the half-score—you are madly, over

head and ears, enamoured? Why, 'tis sheer downright idiocy—a thing to put yourself into the doctor's hands for. What do you remember of her? that she was no better conducted than she should have been before she had well done with being a child. What do you know of her? that, by your own showing, she is a woman getting on for thirty years of age, and who, in all these years, has not found a man fool enough to marry her yet."

"I remember of her," said Steven, quietly, "that she was a pretty delicate-faced child, neither worse nor better, I suppose, than other children of her age. I know of her that she has grown up like this!" He laid his hand for an instant upon his breast pocket, where the photograph lay. "That she has written me a letter showing that, during all these years—years during which, the Lord knows, I have been faithful to nothing! she has continued true to her childish fancy for me (one of the Fanes true to me, Steven Lawrence!), and that, as soon as I find myself back in England, I shall ask her in plain words to be my wife. She was giddy, if you choose, when she was a girl; she is nearer thirty than twenty; no man has married her. I will! The thing is settled,

Klaus, for good or for evil, as far as I am concerned. Let us talk of other matters."

"After supper, Steven; we have ten minutes yet before the haunch is ready, and those ten minutes we'll devote to the discussion of love. After to-night, friend, till the day I lose you, let not the sorry subject of woman or of marriage pass our lips again! I have no thought of changing you, you know I don't believe you're a man likely to alter in whatever you've made up your mind to do, but I should like to tell you—tell you," hesitated old Klaus, with an odd sort of shyness, "a love story of—a friend of mine, say. It happened twenty-five years ago come next fall, and I've never opened my lips concerning it to mortal man or woman before to-night. I always thought I should take it with me, unspoken, to the grave, but you see, Steven, I've loved you as a son—no, I hate the word; a son implies a mother—I've loved you with a feeling such as men don't often have for each other, I guess, out of the wilderness, and if any words of mine *could* put wisdom into your head, I'd speak them—let alone the pain it would cost myself. You'll hear my story, lad? Soh! Well, then, I must think a bit first. I'm no great speaker. I don't know how to spin a yarn of plain

meaning into three volumes or so of fine-drawn stuff and sentiment like a paid romancer. What I've got to say would go printed into one paragraph—about as much as the country paper takes for a giant gooseberry or a shower of frogs when politics are scarce. Still I must think a bit first. Five and twenty years (about what you've lived since you were first set upon your feet) is a longish gap in a man's life—long, I mean, to remember a dream after—and this was a dream, Steven! a young man's dream, such as you are dreaming at this minute. All that it concerns you to hear about is the awakening. You've only to look into your own heart, I reckon, to imagine the first part better than I could describe it now."

He stopped abruptly, and leant his head down for a few moments between his hands, then raised himself, stiff and motionless, to his former position, and with the red glow from the distant fire faintly shining at intervals upon his face, told his love-story—a story destined to be recalled pretty often to the memory of Steven Lawrence during the years to come.

"It was in the old country, my friend, that the thing began, at a town upon the Rhine—whose name doesn't matter—a town

south of Frankfort, where men's hearts, in their youth, are generous as the wine they drink, and where the women for centuries past have borne the reputation of beauty. The girl my friend loved was a type of their beauty at its highest: a marble bust; wide-open eyes, set far apart under a fair and womanly forehead; sun-coloured hair; white arms; a carriage at once lissom and firm, yielding and majestic—*mein Gott!* why do I enlarge on such a theme?—a type of the women, I suppose, who, since the world began, have lured men on ever by the shortest road to perdition! My friend had passed from boyhood into manhood in the same street with her, and his passion had grown with his growth, strengthened with his strength; so, when he was three and twenty, the girl nineteen, they were engaged. There was equality of birth, equality of poverty between them; and one day it occurred to my friend that it might be a manlier life to work for the woman he loved in a new country than starve with her on his good college education, and a certain foolish prefix he had before his name, in the old one. So, after a little tender hesitation on the part of his betrothed, he put his Greek and Latin (his nobility too) for ever aside, and

started with the small patrimony he possessed, to New Brunswick, where some distant relations of his family had already settled. In two years' time he was master of a farm, small but well stocked, and prosperous; a comfortable home to which to take his bride; and he returned to the fatherland to fetch her.

"She met him: she fell upon his neck as he landed from the river steamboat; and in a week their marriage-day was fixed. I was not . . . my friend was not, of a jealous or suspicious character. He was plain—your English word describes him better than any in our language—plain of face, plain of character; where he loved, he loved; where he trusted, he trusted; and where he was betrayed, he was betrayed!" added Klaus, his voice sinking into a hollow, bitter imitation of a laugh. "There was no *unsinn* of any kind, no shilly-shally about the man—in this like you, I think, Steven. What he did, he did; and he loved this woman wholly, with a love that put the possibility of doubt or misgiving out of the question. And they were married.

"There were village tales, both before and after his wedding-day, reaching my friend's ear, of an attachment that had taken place during

his absence between his betrothed and a cousin of his own, a man with whom he had been at college, and whom he looked upon and loved as his nearest friend. He laughed at them; repeated them openly to his bride and to his friend; invited the man to his marriage feast; pressed his hand more warmly than he pressed the hand of father or of mother when he left Germany; and a year later, when, like himself, his cousin had given up the old country and came out to Brunswick to try his fortune, received him into his own house there, and gave him the welcome of a brother.

“Why do I linger? One day, late in the fall—the maples were reddening, I remember, the hickory-leaves like gold—my friend came home from his work at night as usual; and found himself betrayed. His wife had left him. I don’t know how such things affect men in cities,” said old Klaus huskily, “men who don’t believe in over-much, who don’t stake their happiness on one more than another out of the hundred of things which make up the occupation of their lives. This man, you see, without a second’s preparation, had lost all—his life, his hope, his religion! All. He stared blankly about the little sitting-room . . . her work, her book, on the table—a bunch of flowers that he gave her

yesterday on the mantelshelf; then he walked upstairs, as quiet to outward appearance as you are now, took his pistols from the place where they lay by the bedside and walked off to the nearest river station, six miles from his farm, and the route, as he was told on the road, that the lovers had taken. . . .

“ . . . If I had come upon them, then and there, mark you, Steven, with my passion at white heat, I’ll stake high that I should have made short work with them both. I’d no thought of calling him out to fight. I wasn’t in a state of mind to think of honour or of cowardice. Quiet and calm though I kept outwardly, I was mad: thirsting with a madman’s rage for my revenge. And here’s the luck of things! If I had found them then, I *must* have gone through the rest of my life red-handed—no doubt of that, and it wouldn’t have been a matter of conscience at all, but of sheer physical necessity. If I had seen her face—the lily face with its meek eyes looking into his as they once looked into mine—what choice would have been left me (you can answer, you know what love is) in the matter?

“ Well, I say, luck decides all things, and mercifully for me more than for them, perhaps, I did not come upon them at once.



The man who told me they had gone away by the river misled me purposely ; and it was not till a fortnight later—there were few railroads in those days, you know—that I found myself close upon their track at last at a certain town down in Vermont. They had left this town—I wish to say no names—for a village, so I learnt at the hotel, a league or so distant down the lake, and I had only to go on by the five o'clock boat that afternoon and find them.

“ The five o'clock boat. There were three hours to pass away before the steamer left, and instead of going to the bar of the hotel, and deadening myself to the level of a brute, with brandy, as it had been my habit to do during the last fortnight, something moved me to walk straight away out of the town into the fields. It was the late autumn weather, as I have said; yellow, sunshiny weather, with only a ring of sharpness to make the air more sweet. I walked along, unconscious what direction I took, to the outskirts of a wood, a mile and a half, may be, from the town, and sitting down on a new-fallen block of log-wood, took out my pipe and lit it. The cat-birds were calling, the woodpeckers hammering in the woods, the squirrels darting to and fro in the branches,

the lizards chasing the insects in the sun, with the sort of joy I've since observed dumb creatures show just before the winter comes; and something in their ignorant happiness smote me. I thought of the woods by the Rhine, where Franz and I used to go when we were boys. I remembered once, after a fall I had, how the lad, younger and weaker than I was, had carried me to the nearest village, and set off alone through the snow and darkness to bring my mother to my bed. I thought of our play at school, our freaks at college together; and then, with a sudden horror, I remembered what he had done, and what I had got on my soul to do to-night! An intense pity, not for her, not for him, but for myself, came like a flood upon my heart. What! I thought, with the world full of sunshine, with these dumb creatures, and the woods and fields full of joyous life, *I* was to be a castaway? With stained hands, and soiled conscience, with memory from which all my past fair youth must perforce be blotted, I must drag out whatever number of years it should still be my curse and my unutterable misery to live?

“Up till now I hadn't reasoned, you understand. Blind, senseless, animal passion,

had been all that had moved me. In this minute I was a man again. Yes, thank the Lord!" cried old Klaus, fervently, "I was a man! I took no thought then for the future. I thought neither of my disgraced home, and how I should have to live there solitary, nor of the world's opinion—no, nor of them, and of the life that they would live together. One thing only I resolved—to let their guilt be on their own souls, and take no portion of it upon mine. Not for a woman's falseness would I give up something more precious to me than all the marble necks and scarlet lips the world contained—my own unspotted conscience. I wasn't religious then more than you've known me, not with lip-religion, Steven; but in that moment, I believe, as firmly as I believe there is a God above, that His voice spoke to me. Would a little yellow sunshine, the sight of these grey squirrels in the trees have taken away madness like mine, unless He had willed it so?

"Well, in spite of everything I said, I'm spinning out a yarn that would fill a volume, after all; and something in the smell of the meat assures me it isn't far off being ready. I can finish it all short, now. I returned; and from that day I speak of till the day

when I chanced to hear she was dead, close upon eight years afterwards, I never heard nor spoke her name again. There were men, I know, who said I acted with a poor spirit, and others, that I showed a deuced deal more worldly sense than could have been expected of me; but whatever they said, you may believe, concerned me little. To a man suffering what I suffered, there are neither smaller sufferings nor smaller shames. Two years, for very dogged obstinacy, I dragged my life on at my farm—slept in the same bed, ate at the table where she had been at my side! Then I sold everything—there wasn't over and above much to sell: things hadn't prospered with me since she left—and became, as you have seen me, a wanderer on the face of the earth. I haven't, as you know, grown into a man-hater. I have had mates I have liked, one or two friends, besides you, whom I have loved; perhaps, taking all into account, I've led as good a life as the men who live cribbed up like Christians, with a wife and children and all the other blessings of life, in cities.

“Still, Steven, still,” said the old man putting his rough hand abruptly to his breast, as if a pain had smitten him, “there's

been *something* wanting to me always. She was part of my flesh and of my spirit, you see, and as a matter of common nature I've never been to say the same since she was taken from me. And now I come to the moral of all that I've been trying to tell you. As long as the world lasts, and while men are what they are, they must marry, I suppose; I'm not gainsaying that, or setting up my sorry bit of experience against a rule that the world for a good many thousand years has found to answer better than any other. You're not a boy any more, and when you get home you'll want a wife to keep your house, and bring up your children, and set a neat dinner before you and your friends at Christmas—"

"And a wife I mean to have, please God!" interpolated Steven, firmly.

"But you don't need to give over more than what is absolutely needful: your honour, your fireside peace, your children's name—enough, God knows!—into her hands. You don't need to put down your heart for her to tread upon, your reason for her to blind and lead astray, your passionate blind worship for her to make a mock of! Not one man in ten thousand, perhaps," said old Klaus, "is capable of loving so. The ten

thousand are the men to marry. For him—”

“For him, Klaus?” said Steven, as the old hunter hesitated.

“Well, Steven, I’ve got so far, and now I’m a fool. I don’t know what to say. For him—don’t let him do as I did, that’s all! Don’t let him go mad for a white neck and meek eyes and snow-soft hand, and never see that they are a wanton’s! That the lips were never his, that the eyes lied every time they smiled at him—the hand—”

He got up, mechanically raising his rifle from the ground with him, and leaned upon it motionless for a few minutes; then he turned his face away from Steven and brushed his sleeve across it hastily. “Steven,” he said at last, in an altered, strangely softened voice, “I’ll tell you what I’ve thought at times—watching by the fire at night, you understand, or listening, afraid to sleep for the grizzlies, for the cry of the goat-suckers, to tell me that morning was at hand upon the hills: quiet times like these, when something better than the mere passions and discontents of a man’s own heart speak aloud to him—I’ve thought of her, not as my engaged bride, not as my wife, but as she was in her innocence, a little maid of twelve running home from school

and laughing back at me across her shoulder in the summer twilight, and felt sure that if there is a life after this (a better one, mind : that backsliding after death is a doctrine against all teaching of nature to my understanding), that woman, white as on her bride-day, must be mine there ! A superstition, you'd say, like what the Indians hold of their happy hunting-grounds, or the Mahomedan of his houris, but I wouldn't thank the preacher that would make so much certain to me. What ! I've thought, when every winter's snow can bring the dead boughs through to a new April, must it be too high a miracle that death should bring a man's buried love, green and undefiled, into his bosom again ? I've thought this, Steven. I think it still. I am not utterly desolate."

This was the ending of poor Klaus's sermon. As he turned and walked slowly away towards the fire, Steven Lawrence watched him, and a flush of eager feeling rose over the young man's face. "And so the story bears no moral after all," he thought. "Dishonoured in his youth, alone in his age, the thought of the woman who betrayed him is still the best remembrance of this world that the old man possesses, the

foundation of whatever hope he has for the next. Why, with no higher luck than his, the venture, on his own showing, is worth making. Better suffer with a man's suffering than be happy with an animal's happiness, as I have been till now."

An opinion which a very short experience of civilized life was destined greatly to modify.




## CHAPTER II.

### FRESH VIOLETS.

STEVEN LAWRENCE held staunchly to his determination. Five days later old Klaus, with a weighty heart and dim eyes, was standing alone, watching an outward-bound ship from the quay at Vera Cruz, and one severe May evening, after a quick run of twenty-three days, the 'Oneida,' with Steven Lawrence on board, was steaming up the Solent on her way to Southampton harbour.

I use the word severe intentionally. To men fresh from meridional sun, as were all the passengers on board the 'Oneida,' this "wind of God," with its accompaniments of leaden sky and damp searching mists, was more intensely chilling than Christmas snow and frost, with a stiller atmosphere, would have been. West Indians coming for the first time to England wrapped their great blanket-cloaks round their ears and shoulders, and



with blue lips and sinking hearts exchanged remarks together upon the inhuman climate of the country to which their curiosity or their business was bringing them. Englishmen returning, many of them after long exile, home, were sensible that to dream of dear old England under the voluptuous heaven of the tropics is a very different thing to having the east wind of dear old England blowing with oblique cruelty in one's teeth. The captain looked cold, and gave his commands to the call-boy in a rasping short voice and with compressed lips, as though anxious to get as little fog and wind as possible down his throat; the call-boy, a poor little shivering Portuguese, piped out the orders, through his blue swollen fingers, down below; the man at the helm was forced, every quarter of an hour, to call another hand to the wheel while he beat his own numbed arms back to sensation across his chest; the crew, a motley collection of Englishmen and Spaniards, Creoles, Portuguese, and Mexicans, stood huddled together to leeward, while they warmed themselves, in anticipation, at cheery tavern fires in Southampton and Portsmouth. Only one man besides the captain and the call-boy had courage enough to keep un-

dauntedly upon the bridge ; and this man was Steven. But Steven, in addition to his unusual robustness of constitution, had more in his heart, probably, than any other man on board the 'Oneida.' With love, with keen expectation, acting from the brain upon the circulation a man is not only mentally callous to external accident of rain or cold ; he is physically shielded from them. To the shivering West Indians, England was simply a mart in which so many affairs had to be transacted in the shortest possible time ; to the Englishmen, landsmen and sailors alike, it was the good old country, of course, but the good old country seen from a thoroughly chilly and prosaic point of view : a harbour for a fortnight, a goal of rest after years of exile, a market in which so much coffee and sugar had to be disposed of before returning to a country fit for human beings to breathe in. To Steven alone England was an El Dorado ! This leaden sky, yonder pale grey strip of land, were the sky and land encompassing all his desire ! He was returning to his own hearth, his own bit of land from which long years had parted him, and to the woman who was to be his wife there. With his blood pulsating hot and fast through his veins, what did it matter to him whether the

wind blew from the east or the west ? He was going home, and to Dora Fane. English shores looked fresh and fair as ever, he thought—small, though : how dwarfed everything had grown ! why, the Solent that to his boyish heart had looked so sorrowfully wide when he was sailing away ten years ago, was but a little stream to him now that he had lived beside the rivers of the New World. The sight of English roofs and spires affected him almost as though they had been familiar friends. He could scarce dispossess himself from the idea that some face he knew *must* be among the crowd of faces that thronged to watch the arrival of the ‘Oneida’ in the Southampton docks ; and the first chill he had felt that day was when the boat stopped, and he realised definitely that there was no welcome ready for him from any one !

His arrival in England was a matter of the most thorough indifference to all mankind—save porters interested in luggage—he was more utterly alone than he had ever been in Mexican forest or the savannahs and prairies of the west. Does a man, feverish with hope, ever come back to his own country without some such childish disappointment taking away the first keen edge of his excitement as he lands ? He gets over it in an

hour, of course, but I don't think he ever returns to the flush of happiness with which he watched the white streaks on the cliffs grow more vivid, the roofs and spires assume shape, the crowd upon the pier become each a distinct and individual human face. Landing is like writing the first line of your poem ; modelling the first outline of your clay : it puts a dream into form—and breaks it.

Falling in with the crowd, Steven was borne along to the Custom-house ; thence, after seeing his luggage to the station, he went to the post-office, and found, to his immense delight, a letter in Miss Fane's hand awaiting him there. He carried it with him into the coffee-room of Radley's hotel ; then, with epicurean intention of eking out his pleasure as long as possible, warmed himself beside the blazing fire, and ordered his dinner before opening it. Glossy, gilt-initialled paper, an ambrosial smell, half of roses, half of Russian leather, greeted his senses as he broke open the envelope.

"My dear Mr. Lawrence," it began. "My." The letter he had received with the photograph was only "Dear." What a world of advancement his imagination saw in the pronoun ! "We are all so *very* pleased to hear of your proposed return. The Squire

says he is sure, with every belief in Dawes's honesty, that you will make a good twenty-five per cent.—*or fifty*, I forget which, and he is not here for me to ask—more out of the farm, when you take it in your own hands.

“What can you mean when you say ‘you fear you will not see much of us?’ Do you not know that our house is within two miles of Ashcot, and that we shall see you just as often as you choose to walk over and call on us? Katharine and I are staying in town now with Mrs. Dering, and I write this note, sending it, *as you ask me*, to the post-office, Southampton, to say that we all hope you will come and see us in Hertford Street, number 122A, directly you return. I make out from Bradshaw that, leaving Vera Cruz on April the 25th, you will reach England about the 20th of May; but would you mind writing directly you land at Southampton, and then we shall know exactly when to expect you? I am glad you like the photograph. I have one, on glass, of you, that you gave me, do you remember, when you were a boy? How changed you must be—*hélas!* must not that be true of both of us?”

“Arabella and Katharine (she is a grown-up girl, you know, now, engaged to be

married to Lord Petres, and a celebrated London beauty) send very kind remembrances, and I am, dear Mr. Lawrence, sincerely yours,

“DORA FANE.”

Dinner was upon the table at the exact moment that he reached the signature, for Miss Fane's handwriting was lady-like, and Steven's literary powers slow. The sight of a grand cold sirloin of English beef, and a dish of browned potatoes, backed by strong English ale in the pewter, touched the yeoman's heart with irresistible strength of association. And, sitting down at once, his table comfortably drawn up beside the fire, he commenced a meal which would not have disgraced one of Homer's heroes—a meal at which even the waiters of Radley's, accustomed to men's hunger after sea-voyages, looked on open-eyed, and holding their table-napkins tight with wonder.

At the first moment of reading Dora Fane's letter, he had been sensible that some subtle defect, he knew not exactly what, in its tone, had jarred upon him cruelly; as his dinner went on, the honest malt cheering his heart, the ruddy fire putting new warmth into his veins, he felt assured, not a trace of

his fasting dissatisfaction left in him, that it was the kindest, the modestest letter ever penned by a woman's hand. After his meat came rhubarb tart, followed by cheese and radishes, then by a dish of spice nuts, and a bottle of hotel port; and, by the time Steven had made good progress with his dessert, he felt himself fifty times more in love with Dora Fane than ever. It had been an affair of the imagination hitherto, he said to himself, but now——

He could not, as he felt inclined, open, before men's eyes in a coffee-room, the locket which held her picture (he had bought the trinket in Vera Cruz, and wore it, not as civilised men wear such things, upon his watch-chain, but jealously hidden in his waistcoat pocket); but he could hold the paper again that her little hand had newly touched—could feast his eyes upon the words her heart had bade her write! And as he did so, holding the note between him and the fire, yet not actually reading it—reading, in any form, was not a predilection of Steven's—a postscript which, in his first agitation, or on the appearance of dinner, he had contrived to miss, arrested his attention.

“If you can, telegraph to me from Southampton the exact hour at which we may



expect you in Hertford Street, and I will be there to receive you.—D. F.”

Dora Fane waiting for him—expecting his message, perhaps, at this moment—and he, like the savage, like the animal that he was, sitting here before the fire, in stupid enjoyment of his wine and nuts, unheeding of her commands. He got up, to the benefit of his bodily health leaving half of the deep-coloured port in the bottle, paid his bill without a murmur, and sallied forth to the telegraph office, whence the following message from “Steven Lawrence to Dora Fane” was, five minutes later, transmitted :

“Just arrived in Southampton Docks, per ‘Oneida.’ Shall be with you before nine o’clock. I am grateful for your goodness in writing to me.”

After this, an hour or more yet remaining before the train left, he started off for a walk through the streets of Southampton, looking, with the zest of a South Sea Islander, into the shop windows—not quite unmindful of any pretty faces that chanced to stand behind the counter—and gradually fell to speculating whether it might be wise in him to attempt to modify his personal appearance somewhat before presenting himself to his love. She would

not, for certain, be a woman to measure a man by his coat and necktie; but were not all women swayed more than men by the frivolities of fashion? Was it not a risk that she should see him for the first time in his transatlantic clothes, with the rough, backwoodsman air of the other world?

Clothes, of course, there was no time to think of. Miss Fane must accept him, perforce, in the rough shooting-suit that he had got before leaving Vera Cruz. Gloves and a tall hat he might buy in five minutes, and he bought them. Horribly these lavender-coloured "eights" teased him; he had not had a pair of gloves on his hands for the last ten years! Then, a barber's shop immediately confronting the haberdasher's, it occurred to him that shaving off his beard might reduce him, perhaps, to the requisite mean of civilization quicker than any other process, and, crossing the street, he walked in and requested to be shaved at once.

"Shaved plain, sir?" said the polite little barber, glancing up, not without artistic compunction, at Steven's magnificent growth of beard. "Plain style, sir, or the military—moustache left?"

"Not military, for certain," said Steven,

going into the inner shop, and never giving a look at himself in the glass as he sat down. "I'm a stranger in England, and I want to be shaved English fashion—as countrymen, plain farmers or the like, wear their beards."

"Oh, very good!" politeness unaltered, but with an octave, at least, of flattery taken out of the barber's voice by the word "farmer." "I quite understand you, sir." And in a quarter of an hour a pair of moderate-sized whiskers was all the hair remaining on Steven's face.

I said, when I spoke of him bearded, that nature would scarcely commit the anomaly of allying a weak mouth with the bold blue eyes and resolute forehead of Steven Lawrence. His mouth is the reverse of weak. The lips are full and squarely cut, the chin masculine, and still—still the story that is graven there is one of physical, far more than of moral strength, after all. An acute student of human expression might accredit the possessor of that mouth with being passionate in love, warm in friendship, generous, fond of life and of his own share in life always: but heroic, never! And he would be right, viewing heroism from the highest, or transcendental point of view. Steven was just a man to be strong one day

and weak the next—to commit one right action and three faulty ones immediately afterwards: in a word, was a man not to rule his own life, but be ruled by it, as you will see.

He got up and looked long—a most unwonted thing for him to do—in the glass. How young he was still! the thought struck him instantly. How like the boy Steven Lawrence, with whom he had had so little to do in later years. The sight of his own beardless face seemed to bring him back far more vividly to England than the fact of treading upon English ground had done. The old house at Ashcot, the kitchen fire-side, the little bedroom where his mother died, and where her black-framed picture hung (the room to which he had stolen, the picture he had kissed on the April night when he first ran away to sea)—with passionate reality all the happiness, all the misery of his boyish life, was unlocked before him by this strangely familiar face—his own, at which he stood and looked!

“It does make a difference, doesn’t it?” said the polite barber, rubbing his hands. “If you will permit, sir, I should advise the hair being cut—machine, latest improvement—considerably shorter. Both the mili-

tary and the country gentlemen wear the 'air short to the 'ead, if I may be allowed the expression."

Steven submitted passively to being machine-shorn, and brushed and perfumed to the barber's taste; then, with his thoughts still very far away, walked along the High Street, looking neither at shop-windows nor pretty faces now, in the direction of the railway.

Just outside the door of the station a girl of about thirteen stood, selling violets; a girl with a white small face, a shrunken figure, and eyes from whose blue the childhood seemed already to have faded. The moment Steven approached, she singled him out, with the quick instinct of her age, as a man to be cajoled into buying, and, fawning to his side, put up a meagre hand, holding its merchandise, to tempt him.

"Vi'lets, sweet vi'lets, gentlemen! take a bunch to town for your lady, kind gentlemen. I gathered 'em fresh myself this evening. The London vi'lets don't smell like these, gentlemen."

"Don't they, indeed?" said Steven, looking down at her face, and with his deep manly voice becoming marvellously sweet and gentle at the sight of its childish pallor.

"Then I suppose I must have yours, for my lady, as you say."

He took two bunches from the poor little thin hand, and gave the child half-a-crown.

"I've no change, kind gentleman," she whined, looking up at him, and making a pretence of holding the half-crown out for him to take it back.

"No? then you must keep it all for yourself, pretty one," said Steven, cheerily, and putting back her attenuated hand with his own stalwart brown one. "Good-bye."

The child stared in mute wonder after his big figure, until it was lost among the crowd within the doorway. Then she looked at her half-crown; rubbed it bright on her skirt; held it up to the fading evening light; tested it against her lips; finally hid it away in the breast of her ragged frock.

"Easy to see where he comes from," she thought. "Easy to see he's been where they dig the gold. What a fine tall man to have such a kind voice; and he touched *me*—he said good-bye to *me*,"—the colour rising over the pinched, small face. "Oh, ain't he just a flat!"

This was the first definite feminine opinion formed upon Steven Lawrence on his return to England.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE LIFE OF THE WILDERNESS.

FOR generations back Steven's forefathers —farmers by profession, but not averse, whenever money could be made by it, to horse-dealing, or, indeed (so said tradition), to a little irregular trade in French wines and brandies—had lived upon their own small freehold of land in the sea-board parish of Broad Clithero, Kent. No deed of entail secured to the eldest born son of the Lawrences the rights of primogeniture, but primogeniture, unenforced by law, was as sacred in their family, as in the family of any earl of England, as much a part of their social belief as were the doctrines of Wesley of their religion.

When Steven's grandfather died he left two sons : Joshua, the eldest, already looked upon as a confirmed bachelor of forty-five, and Steven, a married man and the father of a boy of eleven—the Steven of this story.

"If Joshua marries," the old man said on his death-bed, looking wistfully at the down-cast face of his eldest son—"if Joshua marries, Steven will have to make a home for his wife and Steenie elsewhere, but till then, I'd like them to bide at Ashcot. I've a feeling little Steenie 'll be master here some day, and I'd like him to grow up on the farm in his youth. A man doesn't work the land with the same heart in his middle age if he's been a stranger to it when he was a boy."

And Joshua Lawrence had not only promised that, whether he married or no, Ashcot should be the home of Steven and his family, but had held faithfully to the letter of his word. A year after the old man's death Steven Lawrence was killed by a fall in the hunting field, and Joshua at once took upon himself, as a matter of course, the maintenance of the widow and her boy.

He was a man of few words, sober—unlike the majority of the Lawrences in this!—plain, reserved; a man who courted the society of men little, of women not at all; and young Steven was soon looked upon just as surely as the heir of Ashcot as though Joshua had been his father, not his uncle. With his sister-in-law to keep his house,



this boy for his heir, what chance was there that Joshua Lawrence, a woman-hater at thirty, should seek to marry a wife at forty-five? No direct word on the part of Joshua himself had ever confirmed the certainty of Steven's heirship, but Joshua was a man chary of speech on all matters, and the way in which he treated his nephew was more than sufficient proof, so thought the world, and Steven's mother, and Steven himself, to show the place the boy held within his heart. Up to the age of fourteen he was sent, profiting as little as possible by the instruction he received, to a tolerable school in Canterbury. He then at his uncle's side learnt—or rather was perfected in: he had learnt from his infancy—the practical management of the land he already looked upon as his own. He was always well dressed yeoman-fashion; rode to hounds better mounted than half the gentlemen's sons in the county; and held his handsome face high when he saluted the parson or squire, or even old Lord Haverstock himself in the lanes.

“Every inch a Lawrence,” the gossips of the parish used to say as they looked after him, “Joshua was a poor creature—had his mother's blood in him—a man to grudge

himself his meat, and die in his bed at last. The boy was of the true Lawrence sort. A chip of the old block, every bit of him." Which, in that neighbourhood, meant a man to live hard and die with a broken neck in a ditch or a broken head in a smuggling fray before fifty. These, tradition had handed down as the orthodox proclivities of the Lawrences; the poor creatures, or men taking after their mothers, being those stray members of the family who kept the farm together and paid for the funeral meats of the Lawrences *pur sang*. Whatever his fate in other respects, Steven learnt when he was within a few weeks of seventeen the exact position in which he stood as regarded Ashcot; learnt it suddenly, his uncle being out in the fields, from the lips of a person in purple satin who arrived, a little boy in her hand, and informed Mrs. Steven Lawrence and her son that she was "Mr. Joshua's lady."

"Not—not his wife?" faltered the widow, throwing a trembling hand round her son's neck, as the whole vista of his ruined life passed before her. "That—*that* child can never be the heir before Steenie!"

And it was in the mingled torrent of virtue and not unnatural venom that this remark called forth from the invader, that

Joshua Lawrence came back from his work across the threshold of his own house. He turned horribly white at seeing these four people in one small room; the pale, indignant-eyed widow, Steven flushed and silent by his mother's side; his own sickly child; the flaunting, gaily-dressed woman, whose dozen of boxes stood already inside the porch. Joshua Lawrence turned white; but he took at once the only side a man of sense ever takes in family discussion—his wife's.

“You might have written, Charlotte, but as you are here you are welcome. Steenie, shake hands with the child. 'Twill make no difference to you, lad. You and your mother will always find a home at Ashcot as long as I live. You are about in time for dinner, Charlotte.”

No difference! How glibly such euphemisms glide from the lips of men seeking to slur over the consequences of their own weakness or their own injustice! The first points, of course, discussed in the neighbourhood as to Joshua Lawrence's marriage were the outside facts of the mystery. Who was this woman? Where had he met her? Why had he married her? Why had he not lived with her? Then, when it was ascer-

tained that there was no mystery at all—that the woman was the widow of a London draper's assistant, that Joshua Lawrence had married her without love or any other intelligible reason (the history of most marriages), had lived apart from her about on the same grounds as he had married her, and had seen her once a fortnight when he went up to Leadenhall Market during the last dozen years or so—the interest turned to the dispossessed heir, young Steven: Steven, to whom the advent of a legitimate wife and son at Ashcot was to make “no difference.” And from old Lord Haverstock down to the lowest ploughman on the farm there was not a heart that did not bleed for the lad under the new position in which he found himself.

He took his fate with a sullen, hard sort of resignation which, at his age, did not augur particularly well for the future. On the morning after “Charlotte's” arrival, went up to his uncle's side in the fields and asked him what kind of wages his services on the farm were about worth? “I'm a servant now, and I don't want to pretend to be a master. Young Josh may have my gun, and my pony, and the rest of it. Play is over for me. Working as I can work, shall I

still, without wronging your family, be able to keep my mother at Ashcot?"

Joshua Lawrence was cut to the quick with contrition. He had married—because he had married! and had done Steven infinite injustice in allowing him through all these years to be looked upon as his heir. But weakness had been his worst sin. In his heart he was a just and not an ungenerous man, and the thought of Steenie working as a servant on the old farm brought tears, for the first time since he was a child, into the yeoman's eyes. Steven was no more a servant than little Josh. There was no reason why the farm shouldn't one day be shared between them alike. Let the boys live together as brothers, and Charlotte and Jane help each other in house-keeping. With more of the same platitudes which men are wont to talk when they would throw oil on the troubled waters of family jealousy and family discord.

Power went, as it always does, into the hands of its legitimate claimants. In six months Steven slouched to his daily work, dressed like a labourer, and young Josh was riding his pony about the country. In six months the keys, one by one, had passed over to Charlotte, and the greater part of

the widow's time was spent in her bedroom in tears and wishes, with which she cheered young Steven of an evening, that she was lying in Clithero churchyard at her husband's side. She was a woman of feeble imagination, and in time probably would have submitted to the prospect of an impoverished future for her boy and herself, if a little bit of present rule had only been left to her in the household. What she could not get over was the loss of the keys. As one by one these insignia of office were wrested from her she would at first faintly expostulate with her brother-in-law, who always promised and never dared to speak to Charlotte about it; then she gave up with only the meek irony that she "hoped Mrs. Joshua would mend the linen and make the preserves last as well as she had done." Finally, when the last shred of power was gone from her, took, as I have said, to her bedroom, and to infusing into young Steven's cup a yet bitterer draught than that which his own galled heart already gave him to drink.

This state of things lasted over a twelve-month; then poor Mrs. Steven's wish was accomplished, and a neat funeral procession, for Joshua was a just man in everything,

conveyed her from the farm to her husband's side in Clithero churchyard. Steven read immense resignation on every face in the house—indecently unconcealed on Mrs. Lawrence's and Josh's! veiled, but none less real, on his uncle's—to the cross which, in the family prayers, they acknowledged to have been laid upon them. And before his mother had been twenty-four hours buried, had begun to form his own plans of escape from the home to which neither duty nor affection bound him now.

The Californian gold fever was at that time still at its height. Spelling over his uncle's *Sunday Times* a fortnight old, by the fire in the long evenings, the boy read of fortunes made, fortunes that would buy up Ashcot, ay, and the squire's land too, in a few weeks, and with no help, no interest, save a man's own stout right arm. What was there to hinder him, if he could reach this El Dorado, from digging nuggets as big as other men's? Was he to spend his life as a labourer on his cousin's farm, when beyond the sea wealth, power, pleasure, were to be wrested from the earth with scarce an effort more than it had cost them to grub up the quickset hedge down in the five-acres?

After a good many sleepless nights, and

when, by dint of studying his old geography books, he had mastered, approximately, where California lay, Steven ventured to sound his uncle on the subject. So much gold had been dug by one man; so much by two brothers; so much by a gang of five. As Josh would have the farm, and—hanging his head—as there was no one much to care about his absence now, wouldn't it be as well to see if his strong shoulders might bring about better fortune in another country than it was ever possible for them to yield him here at home?

Joshua Lawrence's answer was a brief one. His temper had soured wonderfully under his wife's rule; and his never dying sense of the injury he had done Steven, made him peevishly averse at all times to discussing the lad's future prospects. Emigration and gold digging were the last resource of blackguards. He did not know the Lawrences had sunk to that yet. If Steven couldn't brook the thought of young Josh sharing the land with him he must go into trade. Old Wandsworth, the chandler, at Canterbury, wanted an apprentice, and he would not mind paying a good premium, if Steven had a mind for the business. As to California, or any other foreign part, he for-



bad such a word ever being mentioned in his presence again.

It was one Sunday morning on their way to the meeting-house that this conversation took place. On the evening of the next day, a fresh April evening—the smell of the child's violets recalls it to him now!—Steven Lawrence stole away from Ashcot, as he believed, for ever. In the day, while his uncle believed him cheerfully at work among the men, his heart had taken leave of every wood, every field about the farm. As evening came on he had managed on some excuse or another to have a word with each of the labourers as he was leaving work. When his cousin went to bed had followed the child wistfully from the parlour and given him a many-clasped knife that Josh had long coveted with hot envy to possess. Bitter as was his hatred for his life, resolute as was his determination of severing himself from it, Steven had but a boy's heart still, and when the first sharp step was taken—when he had got clear of the farm and stood looking from the high-road down upon the old house and garden bathed in soft spring moonlight—the tears rained hot and fast down the cheek of this bold adventurer who

was to conquer wealth and fortune with his own strong arm beyond the seas.

He reached San Francisco with the very worn clothes he stood in, and the sum of eight shillings in his pocket: his father's watch and a few poor trinkets of his mother's having, with his own work, just sufficed to pay his passage out. Eight shillings, his broad shoulders, handsome face, and the heart of a child. What a stock in trade for a lad set adrift, at eighteen, in the gold diggings! the last resource, as Joshua Lawrence, narrowly but not unjustly, had remarked, of all the greatest blackguards in the world.

Need I describe the kind of El Dorado that Steven had in reality fallen upon? How he starved and feasted alternately. How he worked, and was robbed, openly, then under the guise of dice or cards: one time at the diggings themselves, the next after he had brought back his gold to Francisco, or Sacramento. The boyishness, I need scarcely tell you, was soon knocked out of him: the manhood, I know not by what miracle, never. Associating with the veriest scum of civilization, from the broken down Parisian or New York gambler to the most ruffianly of all roughs, the cosmopolitan "shoulder-striker" of Californian cities, something in

the robust yeoman blood of Steven Lawrence kept him an Englishman, I nearly wrote an English gentleman, still. With cowardice and dishonesty part of the very air he breathed; familiarised with such scenes as only gross ignorance, vice, and newly-gotten gold allied can generate; Steven, however else he erred, was loyal in courage and in honour to his better nature still. Perhaps a certain constitutional slowness, both of mind and body, went far to save him. A quick-brained, lissom-fingered, town-bred man falls easier, perforce, into the habits of city black-guardism, than a man whose country-nurtured perceptions receive temptation slowly, and whose robust hands are physically better adapted for digging gold in bulk out of the earth, than for filching it, stamped, out of the pockets of others. He made no fortune, as many worse men did; was not singularly unlucky, yet never belonged to a gang that came upon any unwonted vein of metal; and the enormous price of provisions, joined to robbery of every kind, usually left him in a condition of infinitely less comfort than the poorest labourer on his uncle's farm at Ashcot.

So went by four years. Then Steven fell in with old Klaus, and, in a few weeks, had ex-

changed the fever of gold-seeking and tainted atmosphere of Sacramento gambling-rooms for the air of the broad prairies, the wholesome austere life of a hunter in the wilderness. Their first meeting happened thus : Klaus like many another old backwoodsman at that time, had been tempted down into California, more, in his case, from curiosity than from any real thirst to join the gold seekers, and, one night, as he was going back to his shanty, on the outskirts of Sacramento city, found a man senseless, and bleeding fast to death in his path. The man was Steven. Coming out from one of the gambling-houses, of which latterly he had become a too-constant frequenter, a street fight had arisen, the sorry history of which would ill befit these pages, and Steven, a champion of weakness, however lost, however degraded, had thrown himself, without stopping to reason, upon the losing side. The result was a wound from a bowie-knife in his side, a stunned head, the loss of whatever money he had about him, and Klaus's friendship ! A man does not go to the help of forlorn womanhood, even amidst the offscouring of Californian streets, without some reward.

Klaus, helped by a stray Samaritan or two, bore on his helpless burthen a couple of hun-

dred yards to his shed ; bound up his wounds ; laid him on his own scanty portion of straw ; gave him cold water to drink throughout the night ; and, early next morning, called in a surgeon to look at him. It was a bad case, said the man of science, and if, as was probable, the lad was given to drink, 'twould end fatally ; and returned no more. But Klaus, like most old hunters, not unversed in leechcraft, thought differently. The lad did not look to him like one given to drink, and for certain, thought the old German, as he looked at Steven's comely limbs and handsome face, was a lad worth holding, if he could be held, to life.

And so, in unconscious helplessness on one side, in purest compassion on the other, began their intimacy. When Steven, after a fierce life and death struggle, got back something of his strength, Klaus carried him away at once down the river, south.

"You have missed your vocation, friend," he said quietly, as they stood together on the steamer's deck, watching the last buildings of the town fade into distance. "You'll be more at home in my life, among the bears and panthers, than in defending one set of *spitzbuben* against another in the streets of Sacramento. As to fortune, you'll make

that nowhere ! Men of your measure don't."

And Klaus on both points was right. Steven was not a man destined to make his fortune. The warfare of the woods—the science of the deer stalker or the still hunter—was far more suited to his capacity than were any of the contests by which men gain pre-eminence over their fellows in the crowded arenas of civilization. Nature had endowed him with no common powers of endurance, with a heart insensible to danger, with love that was a passion for all free, out-of-door life, and with sufficiently quick perceptions to learn the higher intricacies of the science of woodcraft. With loneliness to sharpen these perceptions to the uttermost, with Klaus for his master, and for his school the prairies and forest of Texas—with occasional migrations for wild fowl to the cane-breaks of Louisiana, or the gulfs of Northern Mexico—the Kentish lad made himself, as years went on, a name mighty even in regions where all men, by birth and by education alike, are hunters. He was no amateur, no gentleman sportsman, killing big game by way of fresh excitement in American forests. Not a dollar of his Californian gold remained : not a shilling was ever remitted to him from the old home in England : Steven

Lawrence earned his bread by his gun, as Klaus did, and in every respect lived the life of an ordinary professional hunter. To a gentleman (unless you call old Klaus one) he never spoke; a lady he never saw, except when they went into cities to sell their game, and beautiful American girls, with rose and white skins, and gorgeous Parisian dresses, floated, as impossible visions only, before the young fellow's sight! But for spelling aloud a chapter out of his pocket Bible every Sunday morning—when they had kept count of the days—he would probably have lost the art of reading altogether; for books were rare objects in the wilderness, and Steven, never fond of study, submitted with perfect resignation to their absence.

About twice in three years he despatched a letter home; a letter written in text hand and phonetic spelling, and excessively brief, not because any ill-feeling rankled in his heart still, but because writing was really a herculean labour, both of head and hand, to him. "Not the writing, or the spelling, Klaus," he would say, "though they are the deuce; but the matter. What heads fellows must have who can fill their three and four pages, as some do, every Christmas, and even oftener."

In return three letters, sent under cover always to a friend of Klaus's in New Orleans, reached him from his family during the first nine-and-a-half years of his exile; each of which letters announced a death. The first was from Joshua Lawrence, the sole occasion on which he ever wrote to his nephew; a short, dry letter, saying it had pleased heaven that his Charlotte should be taken from him, and that whenever Steven chose to give up his evil courses a place at the old fireside was ready for him. Young Josh was well, but not as steady at his work as could be wished. Josh's heart was not in the land, and he never seemed happy unless he was running up to London now. If Steven returned, it would be for Josh's advantage that they should undertake the management and the profits of the farm together between them before his death, an event which he did not believe was very far distant.

The next was from Josh himself, written in a feeble schoolboy hand, on inch-deep mourning paper, to inform his dear cousin that "the Lord had seen fit to deprive him of the *best of parents*, that his father having left no will the estate was now his *to an acre*, and that he was very glad to think his dear cousin was getting on so comfortably in



America. Would it be a *great trouble* to send him over some bear skins? et cetera. He was going to fit up the south bedroom (once Mrs. Steven's) as a *sangtom*, and would like bear skins to lay down before the fireplace as he had seen at young Lord Haverstock's."

What a *sangtom* was, Steven no more thought of asking himself than he thought of sending the skins that were to match Lord Haverstock's. His uncle was dead; his last friend gone; the last link that in any way bound him to the old life, broken. He walked about with his rifle, wearing a solemn face than usual for a few days; put some crape round his sombrero as soon as he got near enough to a town to buy it; wrote a few lines to Josh—neither bitter nor contemptuous ones: men to whom orthography is an abstruse science always choose affection as the easiest mode of expressing themselves—then went on silently with his accustomed employments as usual.

The wilderness was, in very fact, his home now, he felt. Up to the present time some unacknowledged hope had ever knitted his heart to England still. In mid-day forest quiet, or watching alone beside the fire at night, he had been haunted by visions of

living on the old farm, of standing by a grave in the old church-yard before he died. All this was over. Every acre was Josh's. This Isaac, six years younger than himself, whose heart was "not in the land," and who was fitting up the old farm-house after the pattern of Lord Haverstock's, had got the farm, for good and all, now. And he was Ishmael. Was it a man's part to fret after one rood of the land that he had lost? Were not these oceans of prairie, this wilderness of forest, this unchecked savage liberty more than compensation for the poor little Kentish freehold of which he had missed the possession?

By the time he had thoroughly brought himself not only to believe in, but to be consoled by this philosophy, came another black-edged letter, directed in a strange, lawyer's hand, to tell him that he was in fact, as years before he had been in imagination, the master of Ashcot. Young Joshua, still weak from a recent attack of illness, had been upset from his dog-cart as he was driving a tandem home from Canterbury one Sunday night, and killed on the spot. Mr. Steven Lawrence's instructions would be waited respecting the administration of the estate, and Francis Dawes, his late uncle's head man,

would be kept on to look after the farm until his return.

This letter was followed, much to Steven's discomfiture, by half a score of others. People who had forgotten the outcast adventurer, or remembered him as the typical prodigal of the Lawrence family, seemed not alone to have got back clearest recollection of him now, but resolved to make his life miserable by continual reading and writing. The solicitor wrote long-winded business letters to him, and received a curt reply that Dawes might carry on the business of the farm at present; he, Steven, had no intention of leaving America, and very probably would decide on selling the estate. Then came strange hieroglyphics from Dawes himself; then a sermon from the Wesleyan minister, setting forth before his absent parishioner the duties that he would discharge to himself and to society by living like a Christian man on his own land (to which Steven, out of patience with all this letter writing, answered, in careful round text, that "he hoped he knew how to live like a Christian man *anywhere*." ) Then Dora Fane wrote to him, for old friendship's sake, and enclosing the picture of a beautiful face, and graceful girlish throat, and five

weeks after he got her letter, Steven, as you know, was taking his ticket for London at the Southampton railway station.

You have heard his raptures over her photograph on the Mexican forest side. Now for the living picture, as it was to appear before him in the velvet-hung wax-lit drawing-room of 122, Hertford Street, May Fair !

## CHAPTER IV.

### TOO LATE !

“HALF-PAST EIGHT, Katharine, and he says in his message—what a message! who on earth before was ever obliged and grateful by telegraph—that he will be ‘with me’ before nine. In another ten minutes, I suppose, this wild man of the woods will be here. Now mind you don’t go away—whatever you do, mind you don’t go away for an instant. I wouldn’t be left alone with Steven Lawrence—oh, not for the world!”

And as she said this, Dora Fane gave, or pretended to give, a shudder at the horrible image which her own words had called forth before her imagination.

She was a pretty, excessively little woman, somewhat under thirty in reality, twenty-two at the first glance, and viewed from her own focus. Perhaps the word little hardly conveys a sense of her proportions. She was not remarkably short, but small-made almost to

the verge of dwarfishness, tiny head, atoms of feet and hands, atoms of features, ears like little pink shells, the waist of a child of eleven. Nothing large about her but a pair of great bead-black eyes and her voice, which was at once voluminous and penetrating, a voice that could make itself heard at any time from one end to the other of a ball-room, or straight across from box to box, in a crowded theatre. Her hair, of a copper-like shade, not wholly true to nature, was cropped short, and dressed in little soft baby-curls round her head; her complexion, in the right focus, was wonderfully carnation and white; jet black brows the thickness of a line, and a faint bluish darkness round her large eyes, contrasted artistically with the fair colouring of the rest of the head. Like most very little women, Dora loved large ornaments. A pair of ear-rings constructed, according to the last beautiful Paris fashion, to look like ladders, hung from her ears to her shoulders; a buckle that would have been large on a larger woman, but on her was a breast-plate, glittered at her mite of a waist; and her fingers were covered with rings that, being designed for normally-sized hands, gave Dora's the look of a child's acting "grown-up people" at its mother's dressing-table.

"Just the sort of beauty to dazzle this poor savage man," she thought, as she stood, tiptoe, before the fire, and glanced, with one little hand resting on the crimson velvet of the mantel-piece, at herself in the glass. "He may have seen plenty of girls like Katharine—the American women have that sort of *beauté du diable*, they say. No man could ever see a woman like *me* out of London or Paris!" Then aloud, "You hear me, Katharine? You'll be sure not to leave Steven Lawrence and me for one moment alone together."

"Well, yes, I hear, Dot," answered Katharine Fane, who, in a Cinderella morning dress, was sitting on a low stool by the fire-side, and as she spoke a pair of serene fawn-coloured eyes were raised slowly to Dora's. "I hear, but I don't understand. Of course it was quite right that I should stay at home to chaperon you and Stev—I beg his pardon, and Mister Lawrence—but as to leaving you alone. . . Dot with every confidence in your ability, let me give you one piece of advice. Don't, as I'm afraid it's your nature to do, Dot dear, over-act with Steven Lawrence. Because a man has spent ten years or so in the woods of America, it does not necessarily follow that he should be a

perfect fool, you know. After the kind of letters that have passed between Steven Lawrence and you, it seems to me a great deal more honest and natural, and everything else, that you *should* be left alone. I look upon you already——”

“In the same light that you look upon yourself and Lord Petres?” cried Dot, as the girl hesitated. “Is that what you would say?”

The great shining eyes sank down and gazed intently into the fire again. “I would be perfectly honest with the poor fellow, Dot, if I were in your place. Acting and counter-acting, holding out encouragement one day, feigning reserve the next, may be very well in the kind of world and with the men you and I’ve had to do with. But with this man—I don’t know why—something tells me that ’twould be best to be sincere. Do you know, Dot,” abruptly, “I like this poor Steven, his telegram, and his letters and all, wonderfully?”

“His letters!” cried Dot, with her ringing laugh. “What, the spelling or the composition, or what?”

“I like the heart of them,” said Katharine Fane. “All the men I have known could spell and compose too—if you call it composition—



but none of their letters ever touched me like the one this poor fellow wrote to you from Mexico. I think the way in which he thanked you for your photograph was charming, Dot—oh yes, spelling and grammar and all! To think of a man, after ten years of absence, being touched, as he was, by seeing the picture of the woman he had loved when he was a boy!”

Dora Fane took her hand from the mantelpiece and raised a scrap of Mechlin lace that it held to her lips. “Katharine,” she said, when a minute or two had passed by silently, “do you think, really, there’s any truth in what some people say about our being alike? Now, on your honour—I’ve a particular reason for asking you this to-night.”

“Our being alike!” cried Katharine with a start. “Heavens, Dot, how far away I was just then! Well, you know some people do see a likeness. Who was it—Lord Petres?—no, Mr Clarendon Whyte—said the other day there was a strong family likeness in the turn of the upper lip. What in the world made you think of that now?”

“Oh, nothing particular! just a fancy of mine. We’re not alike in reality, and when you see us together of course, because you’re

twice my size, and—and paler and stouter,” added Dot, looking consciously at the reflection of her own small face in the glass. “But, as far as feature goes—now, don’t you think it quite possible that a photograph of you might be taken for me by any one who didn’t know us well?”

“By any one who didn’t know us, certainly. A photograph of mine, or of yours, might be taken for Bella, or the Phantom! by any one who didn’t know us. What *are* you asking all this for, Dot? Are you afraid Steven Lawrence will think me more like your portrait than you are yourself, and insist upon being in love with the wrong Dulcinea? Set your mind at rest, Dot. A man like Lawrence would not be likely—”

“To set his affections so high!” interrupted Dot. “No I suppose not,—thanks for the compliment though, Katharine dear! But I am not at all afraid,” perching herself on a footstool so as to command a fuller view of her own dainty image. “I think you a classic beauty, you know, Katharine. Hyacinth eyes, and Naiad hair—no, Naiad eyes and Hyacinth hair (what is that thing Clarendon Whyte repeats of the Poet—Shelley, is it? who wrote about baboons murdering people and putting them up the chimney?).

But still, in my own humble way, I would rather be Dora than Katharine Fane any day. Now look at me, Katharine, look at me, and say if I'm not looking my best to night? Isn't the pearl-grey silk, and the knot of crimson velvet in my hair, perfection? Look at me and say, quite frankly, if there is anything that *could* add to my appearance at this moment?" And she turned herself slowly round, as the pivoted figures in the shop windows turn, for her cousin's approval; then, with her tiny hands in a posture, her great eyes wide open, and her red lips in a pretty attitude of repose, stood waiting for a reply.

Katharine looked at her attentively: the fluffy short hair, the scarlet cheeks, the enormous ornaments, the tiny hands, the yard-and-a-half skirt, more than half of which lay outspread behind Dora Fane upon the heath-rug.

"Dot," she said at last, "you're a beautiful little woman." Dot's eyes brightened. From man or woman, from duke or dress-maker, any incense to her beauty could make this doll's heart beat with rapture. "I always have thought, always shall think you the prettiest little creature in every ball or theatre or assembly of any kind where I

see you. But to-night—now don't take it amiss, Dot—to-night I should like you better if you looked a little less, if—if you had just a shade less of colour in your cheeks ! It makes you look hectic, Dot. It makes you look ol—less young, dear, than you do when you are pale. Now you won't be cross with me for saying this ?”

“ Less colour ! why I have been standing before the fire,” cried Dot with dignity. “ I get like this always at night, Katharine, as you know, I'm consumptive—if you could feel how my poor cheeks are burning now ! It is not everyone that admires a complexion of *stone*, you must remember, Kate.”

“ No, Dot. I only said what I thought, I only meant——”

“ Oh well ! of course I can go into a cooler room,” interrupted Dot, walking away towards the door. “ Of course I can bathe my poor flushed cheeks, and try to bring them up to the standard of classic pallor before Mr. Lawrence comes. Only one thing, please Katharine—the moment you hear a double knock, come as quick as you can up to my room. I don't want you to be the first—I mean, I could never have courage to come

down by myself and find the man waiting here alone for me."

The tiny figure swept out of the room, and Katharine Fane went back to her old attitude, her old contemplation of things "far away," in the glowing heart of the fire. In a close-fitting brown dress, with plain bands of white linen at her throat and wrists, not a brooch nor an ornament of any kind, her hair pushed back carelessly from her forehead, the celebrated London beauty—the syren who had led so many men to their ruin—looked fairer than she had ever looked at court ball, in silk and roses, and with a throng of slaves at her feet: for an unwonted light was in Katharine's eyes; an unwonted feeling made the beautiful lips serious as well as sweet.

For the first time in her life she was about to be brought, not at second hand, as in operas and novels, but into direct contact with the romance all her monitors and all her experience had taught her to laugh at, yet which her inmost heart so passionately believed in still. This man, this peasant they were waiting for, was "in love" with Dora. Her eyes softened, her pulses thrilled at the thought. Love! Poor little Dora with the wax-doll face, wax-doll heart, was

standing (prettily painted, and busy at this moment with rice powder) on the threshold of the great mystery, and she—was engaged to Lord Petres ! and had wide vistas of dress, diamonds, dinners, carriages, and opera boxes, before her. There was the difference.

A double knock came at the house door; and Katharine Fane, ordinarily the most collected woman living, rose hurriedly to her feet, and, forgetting Dot's commands and Dot's existence, stood and waited with a beating heart beside the fire. There was a light quick foot-fall upon the stairs; then the door opened and closed; and Steven, pale with excitement—handsomer, nobler she thought, even in this second, than any man whom she had ever known—stood before her.

She moved towards him, with an outstretched hand, with parted lips, and he caught her abruptly in his arms and kissed her.

"I—Mr. Lawrence !" she exclaimed, freeing herself, too late, from his clasp. "I—I—you have mistaken. I am Katharine Fane."

Too late ! The epitome of the whole story I have to tell is written in those two words.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE RIGHT FACE.

STEVEN loosened his hold mechanically, but his heart refused, as yet, to take cognisance of its mistake; a mistake, in the common drawing-room comedy called love, to vary, pleasantly than otherwise, the trite unravelling of the time-worn plot, but which for the yeoman was just the ruin, the overthrow of his whole life.

“Katharine!” he repeated, as if he had not understood her, and gazing steadily at the perfect face that so far surpassed his dreams, “how good you have been to me! What have I done that you should treat me with such goodness?”

“Mr. Lawrence,” said Katharine Fane, gently, for it was not in her to be aught but gentle, yet with as much stately coldness as she could command, “I must repeat that you are mistaking me for my cousin Dora. She will be down directly—we received your tele-

gram an hour ago, and expected you already. Dora is looking very well. You will scarce see a change in her, I should think. Come near the fire, will you not, please? After your beautiful Mexico how cold these English east winds must seem to you!" And she walked back, calm and self-possessed to the fireside; thence invited Steven with a gesture of her hand to approach her.

He came up, spoke never a word, but stood and looked at her still; looked at her until, with all the experience gained during the two last London seasons, Katharine Fane's eyes sank, and her heart began to beat thick and fast. Placed with a man of the world in this ridiculously awkward position, she had freed herself from it by a single word, a word lightly spoken but impossible to misconstrue; with any other man of Steven Lawrence's condition she would, his lips having desecrated hers, his eyes bringing hot blushes into her cheek, have rung the bell and ordered his condign expulsion, then and for ever, from the house. But with this poor savage, his beautiful face, his childish passionate admiration of her, his utter disregard of her explanations appealing to her as a child's, a dog's mute eloquence might have done, how was it possible for her to feel otherwise



than generous and forgiving ! She was in a position the like of which had never tried her worldly knowledge or her pride till now ; she stood face to face before a human creature she had had scant dealing with during her twenty-one years of life—a man, simple, honest, terribly in earnest, and for whom her instinct told her a bitter awakening was at hand—and so, instead of attempting to put him in his place, instead of attempting anything, she simply lifted up her head to him and smiled. (To his last hour Steven could never forget how she smiled !) “I was a very little girl when you went away, Mr. Lawrence, but it seems to me now that I remember you. I remember you gave me a bunch of primroses the last evening Dora and I ever saw you. How pleasant it is to think of old days like those ! I am very glad that you have come back to England for good !”

Her voice, her kindness, a certain dawning pity in her eyes, woke Steven to the truth.

“I have been a fool,” said he bluntly, “and now I have just to ask your forgiveness and go. Miss Fane, I have been misled, I see, by my stupidity, or through the cruellest of mistakes. I returned—shall I shame to own it ?—for the sake of Dora Fane, and I find—”

"You will find," cried Katharine, earnestly, "you will find Dora Fane the dearest, the most charming little creature in the world! I speak warmly of my cousin, Mr. Lawrence, and you will see that I do not over-estimate her. We are somewhat like each other, I think"—here she shrank again from the expression of his eyes—"only Dora is fairer and smaller—I always say younger-looking; however, in a moment you will see her. How time passes! Can it really be ten years since you and Dora last met?"

Steven Lawrence took a locket from his pocket, unfastened its clasp, and held it out open to Katharine. "This picture that Dora Fane sent me is of you," he said, "and is as like you as a flat surface without colour and without life can be like a woman. If I lived for a hundred years and might speak to you daily, Miss Fane, I should never make you know what the possession of this little photograph has been to me during the last six weeks."

She took the locket from his hand, and in a second the blood flushed crimson in Katharine's face; the photograph was of her. The instinct of the poor savage was true; he had returned for her, and no other, and had found her—thus!

"This is a most absurd mistake, Mr. Lawrence. Dora is so desperately careless she never can do or say anything without making a mistake of some kind. Luckily, this one can be easily rectified," with a little laugh. "Leave your locket with me, Mr. Lawrence, and come for it to-morrow morning. The right face shall be in it then, I will promise you."

"The right face is in it now," said poor Steven. "Thank you," as she passively let him take it from her hands. "Whatever happens, I suppose I have your leave to wear it, haven't I?"

Before Katharine Fane could give the decided negative this question deserved, the door opened, and Dot, luminous in the pearl-grey silk, and holding a taper light so that it shone with artistic concentration on the knot of crimson velvet in her hair, appeared there.

"Here is Dora!" cried Katharine, leaving her impending refusal for ever unspoken. "Mr. Lawrence, I don't think there needs any introduction between you and my cousin Dora?"

Steven turned, and before he had time to collect his thoughts the little figure was at his side, a little white hand, boneless like a

baby's, in his. "I'm so glad to see you!" cried Dot, in her unmodulated voice. "We expected you an hour ago, and were afraid—weren't we, Katharine?—an accident must have happened to the train, or that the telegraph-wires were wrong, or something. Now, when did you arrive? Oh, to-day, of course—how silly I am! I mean, had you a good passage? We saw the last West Indian mail had yellow fever on board, and were so frightened about it, Mr. Lawrence."

"We had no yellow fever, I thank you," said Steven, "and we had a fair wind till two days ago, when it shifted to the north-east. I believe it was the quickest passage that has been made from Vera Cruz this year."

"And—and you feel yourself at home in England?" said Dot, looking up, not without admiration, at the yeoman's muscular figure and bronzed face. "You are not a bit changed, Mr. Lawrence—not a bit. I see you just as you were that last day at Clithero, yes, even to the bunch of violets at your button-hole."

And Dot laughed—the terrible laugh that was so incongruously disproportioned to that little throat of hers—and stretched out her morsel of a hand towards Steven's violets.

He took them from his button-hole, and flung them into the grate. "They are withered, Miss Fane," said he, shortly. "As I was going into the station at Southampton I saw a child with a basketful of them, and, for old days' sake, I suppose, I took a bunch. They are dead. They have no smell now."

"Ah, you are spoilt by all your grand exotics! Arums and cactus and things—I've seen them in the glass-house at Kew. You won't care for our poor English flowers after all you have been accustomed to in the tropics."

"Arums and cactus are flowers with no smell at all, Miss Fane," remarked Steven, with grim truthfulness; "and among all the plants in the world I've never met with any that give a better smell than English violets. Are you fond of flowers?" and he turned to Katharine again. "I've brought over some hardy Mexican plants with me, that I believe with care I shall bring to thrive on the sunny side of Ashcot. Are you interested in such things, or do you care for nothing of any sort out of London?"

"If I do I must have a bad time of it," said Katharine Fane; "considering that I spend two months, at most, of the year in London, and the rest at Clithero. Surely you don't

think Dora and I have grown into London fine ladies, do you, Mr. Lawrence? Nothing would interest me more than your plants; you must ask us over to Ashcot, please, as soon as we are all down in Kent, to see them."

"Oh, *yes!*" cried Dot, with effusion. "I do so love flowers—" which was true, as the trimming of ball-dresses—"I should take the greatest interest in studying botany with any one who could teach it me pleasantly. Katharine is so clever, she can remember the Latin names, and everything: but that's all beyond me. Now do tell us, in English though, about the beautiful plants you have seen. What can a South American forest be like?" clasping up her small hands. "What would I give to see all the wonders you have, Stev— Mr. Lawrence, I mean!"

"There's a grand Mexican picture of Bierstadt's in the Exhibition this year," said Katharine's soft voice; "a picture of some old city seen at sunrise through a vista of overhanging forest trees. I stood before it yesterday, and wondered whether such forms and colours could possibly be true to nature. You must come with us and tell me, Mr. Lawrence. You will be in town for some time? No? well, nothing is easier

now than to run up from Clithero for the day. It's a good season in everything, except east winds; the exhibitions are first-rate; the prince and princess go everywhere, and Patti is singing. If you stayed we should not let you be idle, I can tell you! General Dering and my sister are so lazy, and Dot and I are for ever in want of an escort."

Katharine's was a voice that nature had filled with lavish music, and when, as now, it was her pleasure to throw into it a certain veiled cadence of half-distant, half-familiar tenderness, no man, whatever his age or condition, had yet been known to resist its charms. The yeoman was no exception to the common rule. Five minutes ago, smarting under his first intolerable disappointment he had fully made up his mind to rush away from Katharine and from England, from all women and from all civilization, for ever. In less than an hour's time he found himself talking in this pleasant amber fire-light—Katharine's smile and voice leading him sweetly along the downward path where they had led so many a wiser man before him—just as unrestrainedly as he had ever talked beside the camp-fire in lonely American forests to old Klaus. Reason, had he listened to reason, would have said to him,

“You have been a fool; have made a fool’s error; retrieve it. The beautiful siren face, the touching voice, are sold to a man whose fortune and whose birth entitle him to the possession of such things, and are being put forth now for the benefit of the cousin, the little loud-tongued woman who by reason of her waning youth and want of dower, may stoop to marry you. Have done with them : explain openly your folly, if you will, or be silent ; but have done with them. Leave them, in all honour, as it is in your power to do still, and go on with your life just as if Katharine Fane’s face was not hid away in your breast and in your heart !”

But Steven was pre-eminently a man to be led by his senses rather than by his brain in everything ; and, besides, what did he know of well-bred women or of the well-bred world ? How should he tell that these soft looks, and pleasant words, and graceful smiles, were a science in which, at one and twenty, Katharine Fane chanced to be an adept ?

Already her eyes sank as she looked at him, already the colour flushed into her delicate waxen cheek at his voice ; at one moment she would question him with animated voice, with hearty interest, about his wanderings, at the next speak (as if they



were old familiar friends) of Ashcot and of the pleasant country life that lay before them all down in Kent—Dot playing an admirable second throughout—and Steven was in paradise!

His kiss, let me add, upon those perfect lips was fresh in his memory still.

## CHAPTER VI.

### KATHARINE.

SHE was one of those rarely-gifted women whom all men think beautiful. No class opinions could have weight in judging of Katharine Fane; the fair proportions that Rotten Row and the drive went wild about, artists and sculptors coveted as a model; the face that Descou and Elize vied with each other to adorn in the last new Parisian bonnet, a poet could worship as the throne of pure and simple womanhood still. How shall I describe her? how, by barren category of feature, bring before you the breathing, winning, erring woman, who was to be the happiness and misery of Steven's life? A woman, of whose face the best photograph was but a caricature; and, in whose exceeding beauty the mere outward perfection of line and colour was the poorest part!

She was tall, without looking her height, and somewhat largely made; a waist short

and nobly proportioned; marble-fair arms and bust; hands requiring six-and-three-quarters in gloves, but of unrivalled shape; and a foot that women allowed to be her best point. A little head, well poised above the round white throat; golden-brown hair that waved by nature; golden brown eyes, large, clear, and set in Juno-like serenity beneath the pensive brows; full lips, parted even in repose; a skin delicate as the petals of a Provence rose, and almost as devoid of colour. . . . I could go on with the category, but never bring Katharine Fane herself before you! It was the smile, the voice, the sweet indescribable womanliness of this woman, that made her what she was; the rare unison of charms that neither page nor canvas can seize, and that gives even to the memory of some women such undying fragrance! When Mary lured on her train of victims to their doom must not something more than beauty have shone from her face? Has any picture, has any history given us a clue to the witchcraft of the fatal queen?

People who disliked her—there were very few in the world who did so—called Katharine Fane a consummate actress; every look, every gesture, every word from a woman like that must be artificial, they said. And

the generalization was about as shallow as the majority of generalizations. Miss Fane was a consummate actress; yet was each one of her looks, words, and gestures the perfection of nature. Unless you go to the Redskins, perhaps (and they are a good deal hidden by their ochres), you will never find such outward lack of artifice as in a woman of Katharine Fane's type—never, that is to say, find nature so well selected and so well combined by art. Does a painter go abroad and copy the first landscape, line by line, as he sees it? the cumuli of white clouds and the manufactory chimney that cuts them brutally in twain? the exquisite middle distance of blue moor, and hideous level of dull red-brick field for a foreground? The mastery of art, above all of histrionic art, whether for the footlights or the world, depends on power of adequate selection and combination; and a true artist exercises this, as he does his other faculties, unconsciously. Katharine's modest art, her mission on the planet, was to please. Heaven had bestowed on her the first essential gifts for pleasing; education and the subtle inspirations of her own genius had wrought these endowments to perfection, or the nearest possible imitation of nature. During all her chequered

intimacy with Steven—Steven whose unsophisticated instincts were really in most things a crucial test of sincerity, and who, after the first ten minutes, detected a hundred affectations in Dot—he never once was reminded by her of the social difference between them. A yeoman, whose last rough ten years of life had been spent in California or the wilderness, and a high-bred English girl, who for two seasons had had half London at her feet, they ever stood, so thorough, so delicate was her tact, as man and woman upon equal ground; and it would have taken much deeper knowledge of women than poor Steven possessed to decide how far this equality was the result of perfect acting, and how far of genuine sympathy. When the eyes and the cheek and the voice of a beautiful woman all ring true, it may take more than one man's lifetime to ascertain the fathom-line of her heart. Probably Chastelard and Rizzio and Darnley would have said, each as he died, that the exquisite lips of the royal actress had spoken words of love for him, and for him alone.

At three years of age Katharine Fane first learnt that her golden curls, soft white arms, and beautiful face were good and profitable gifts; easily convertible, when nestling

around grown men and women's necks, into fruit and flowers and fond kisses—the riches of that age. At five she was sensible that pretty babbling words to women, and disdainful looks followed by quick relenting to men, brought as many slaves as she chose to possess to her small feet. And from that time to the present, sixteen never-idle years, the knowledge and practice of her craft had been steadily progressing.

She was not less chary of her powers at twenty-one than she had been as a coquette of five. Women less largely endowed reserve their forces; are charming for men only, and among men draw fine distinction—such a smile for an elder brother, such for a married man, such for a prince. Katharine exercised her sway, royally, over the whole world. Women well-nigh forgave her her beauty in consideration of her frank good-nature, her generosity, her large-heartedness. She was one of those exceptional women towards whom her own sex, without using the expression, have somewhat the feeling that men have for a good fellow. Children, from little princesses at court balls down to the ragged urchins on the Kentish sea-board, clung to her skirts and thrust up tiny hands into her warm white clasp the moment they

saw her. Old men felt young when she talked to them. Married men forgot their chains beneath her smile. Poor men, plain men, ungifted men, felt their lot lightened after they had been introduced to Katharine, so cunningly could she draw forth from each, and having drawn forth, appreciate, the one poor talent that had power to raise its possessor an inch or two in his own sight. Of the great army of her slaves, men handsome, young, rich in every respect in the world's goods, I need not speak. Any very beautiful woman in the zenith of her youth can command this vassalage. In her willing sovereignty over classes whom shallower coquettes do not regard as worth conquering; over her own sex, children, men whose homage brought no glory; lay the special characteristic of Katharine Fane—the characteristic that must never be lost sight of if her relations with Steven's life are to be understood.

From the moment that she saw him first she knew that his heart was at her feet, and that she would never quarrel with him for his madness! She who could choose her rich and well-born slaves by dozens would not forfeit the homage even of this Kentish farmer! Of course he

must marry Dot (poor little Dot should never be injured by rivalry of hers), and worship herself from afar, and with worship much too reverential for Lord Petres, the least jealous of men, to take umbrage at; but he must not be let go, or not further than Zuleika, the old white cat at home, would let the mouse go who has once felt her talons unsheathed above his beating heart. Dot, to view the matter in no other light, wanted help. Dot, charming as she was to men of a different stamp, was not perhaps quite up to the simple level of Steven Lawrence. And then the ludicrous mistake which brought him here certainly required some tact and kindness to set it right!

All this Katharine thinks as she sits, her cheek resting on her hand, her face turned away from Steven, while Dot runs on from one bit of county gossip to another, and engages his answers, not his eyes. And then she remembers how, before he came, she had told herself that his was no light fancy for her cousin, but real love: the unknown mystery of all operas and novels! She feels the clasp of his strong arms—hears his broken words—trembles under his kiss—and the blood shows under her shell-clear skin, and



her head droops a little—and Steven's conquest is complete.

At about half-past eleven a carriage stopped, and a double knock came at the house-door. Dot rose to her feet; she had had to suppress several vehement inclinations to yawn during the last half-hour or so, and going quickly up to one of the windows, pulled back the curtains, and peeped out.

"Here's Bella at last! How in the world can she have sat out an Atcherley dinner till this unearthly hour?—and—and—yes, it is—Clarendon Whyte with her. How very strange!" And she ran back, and, perching herself before the glass, examined herself in it, just as she had done before Steven's arrival only with increase of eagerness.

"Bella always *does* do such extraordinary things! Clarendon Whyte is a great friend of General Dering's, Mr. Lawrence. I am sure you will get on together. He has been an immense sportsman—lions and tigers, and all sorts of big game in India. You will have *so* much in common, won't you?"

"I wonder whether Mr. Lawrence and Bella will remember each other," said Katharine, with her happy knack of turning aside any excessively silly observation of Dot's. "Let me see!—ten years. Bella

must have married just about the time when you left England. Ah, you will find her more changed than any of us. I won't say your name for a moment when they come, and we will see if Bella recognises you."

Steven rose to his feet as the drawing-room door opened; and a large handsome woman, with diamonds in her dark hair, and a look of Katharine in her eyes, walked up and offered him her hand.

"Mr. Lawrence I am sure," after a shake intended, thought Steven, to make him wish himself in the backwoods again, so great was the distance at which it seemed to place him. I should have known you anywhere, Mr. Lawrence, from your likeness to your—relations." Mrs. Dering was going to say "family," but remembered, just in time, that it was a word inapplicable to persons in Steven Lawrence's class of life. "Come up to the fire, Mr. Whyte, we want a great deal of warmth and sociability, after all we have been going through this evening, don't we? I hope you have tea ready for us, Kate dear?"

And throwing down her ermined cloak, Mrs. Dering turned her handsome bare shoulders carelessly upon Steven, then draw-

ing her sister to her side, touched her cheek with her lips.

“Fancy, Kate,” she said, when Katharine had shaken hands with Mr. Whyte, “Lord Petres was there, after all. He ate nothing after looking at the first remove. Was wonderfully agreeable—impossible for the Atcherleys to be offended—but never put a morsel to his lips. I asked him the reason after dinner. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘the Atcherleys are old friends of my father’s, and once a year, regularly, I dine with them—besides, I hoped Katharine would be here—but I am not in a state of health to take liberties with myself. People who would shock your whole system with half-cooked lamb, at the outset of a dinner, are capable of anything. I helped myself once to a dozen or so of green peas with fear and trembling, and even they had pepper—*pepper*—the common, gross, black pepper of our national kitchen among them. If I had been a strong man, I might have felt myself called upon to respect Mrs. Archerley’s feelings, and go regularly through the poison of every course. An invalid’s first duty is to himself.’ Then he left the house.”

Katharine laughed. “How well I can imagine his tone ! It will take him a fortnight

to recover from that lamb. Did you settle anything about to-morrow?"

"Lord Petres has taken a box for us at Covent Garden. I asked him to dine here and go with us, but he declined—afraid, I suppose, of more lamb and pepper, so he is to join us there, if his health is well enough; and Mr. Whyte has promised to be our escort."

While the sisters talked, Mr. Whyte was murmuring in a half-tone into Dot's ear, and Steven, unnoticed by anybody, stood still behind Mrs. Dering's shoulder. Katharine turned and raised her eyes to his. "Are you fond of music, Mr. Lawrence? If you are, I hope we shall see you in our box at the opera to-morrow evening. Patti sings in the 'Figlia.' You will not regret the trouble of going, I think."

It was not in Steven's nature to be shy or awkward, however studiously a pair of handsome shoulders might be turned upon him. It takes a larger amount of civilization than he possessed to make a man over-sensitive of his own deficiencies, or over-anxious about the opinions of others. "I shall come with pleasure, Miss Fane. I am not sure whether I like music or not, but I should like, for the first time in my life, to see a

London opera-house. It is very good of you to ask me."

The slightest sidelong glance of Katharine's eyes bade Mrs. Dering invite him to dinner ; but Mrs. Dering did not or would not interpret the expression aright. " You will feel strange in your own country, Mr. Lawrence," she said, with glacial emphasis ; " I cannot imagine any place more intensely solitary than London to a person without friends or occupation there."

" But Mr. Lawrence, if he meant to stay in town, would not be without occupation !" cried Katharine, bravely. " Dot and I would find plenty of occupation for him, you may be sure, Bella. You don't know Lord Petres, Mr. Lawrence ? Well, he will call on you to-morrow, and you'll find him a capital guide about, if you don't know town well. The Charing Cross Hotel, is it not ? Ah ! here comes tea, and we shall begin to be a little bit sociable. Mr. Lawrence—Mr. Whyte—" introducing the two men, who each inclined his head by about a third of an inch. " Bella, as you are cold, come into my place by the fire, while I make tea." And crossing over the hearthrug, she seated herself at Steven's side, and bade him wheel a

little table before her and help her in pouring out the tea.

From the day, nearly two years ago, when Katharine first promised under her sister's tutelage, to marry Lord Petres, her word, her slightest whim, had been law in Hertford Street; for Mrs. Dering, as anxious as any woman could be to possess a peer for her brother-in-law, had in her inmost heart gravest suspicions of Katharine's fidelity, and judging of her as she judged her babies, hoped to get the nauseous dose quietly swallowed by well plying her with every imaginable sweet and toy beforehand. "Katharine has too much excellent feeling ever to allow any man's hopes to lead him too far," she was accustomed to say when intimate friends blamed her for countenancing any new flirtation of Katharine's. "There is a great difference between them in age, and Lord Petres generously desires that Kate should look upon herself as free throughout the engagement. Whatever my sister does or wishes, I countenance." So now, in rebellion to the staunchest principles of her social creed, Mrs. Dering, before five minutes had passed, found herself, willing or unwilling, forced at least to be outwardly civil to Steven Lawrence—Steven Lawrence, whom in her

young days she had looked upon as very slightly removed from the ploughmen, who came in blue kerchiefs, and white smocks to Clithero Church on Sunday. That Dot, the poor first cousin, might have to marry this man she was prepared to accept as a necessity. A first cousin after marriage is but a distant relation, and it would unquestionably be better to see Dot decently planted on a Kentish farm than have her running about, a middle-aged girl, looking upon her own and Katharine's houses as her home in London. Only why make of the man, his intentions undeclared, an intimate friend? Why advertise the possible misalliance by showing him to all London at Dot's side?

With a sigh Mrs. Dering looked at the growing animation of Katharine's face, and suffered herself to listen with as good a grace as she could command to their conversation. The fancy would last a week if Kate was unopposed, she consoled herself by thinking; a fortnight if she was contradicted! Kate's fidelity to her last favourite—a poet-tailor out of Shropshire—outlived six days. A yeoman, even with Steven Lawrence's handsome face, could not surely amuse her longer. As long as no one but Clarendon Whyte was by to see, it did not matter much, after all, and

perhaps, for Dot's sake, it was wise to make the poor young man feel as little frightened in his position as possible.

The poor young man, far from being frightened, waited on Katharine at her tea-making with a quiet, thorough self-possession that Mr. Whyte, through half-closed eyes, saw and disapproved of exceedingly. "Miss Fane has another slave," he remarked to Dot, for they were talking on the other side of the fire in a tone too low for the rest to overhear. "Whatever my opinion may be of your cousin's taste this time, I am glad, at least, to find that Mr. Lawrence's attentions are reserved for her, not for you, Miss Fane, as you cruelly led me to think would be the case."

Mr. Clarendon Whyte was a well-looking young gentleman, with close shaven cheeks, an ambrosial black moustache, a real or affected incapacity for pronouncing the letter "r," and a profound general distaste for smiling or being amused in any way. A young gentleman with sympathies evidently attuned to the magniloquent in common life, and who, had he been writing of himself, would probably have been painted as a beautiful wicked seductive member of the governing classes; who, when his fancy was



set upon a woman, "meant it," and before the sirocco-blast of whose passions all the conventional virtues or barriers of society were wont to whither like a parched scroll; an *homme incompris*, going the pace bravely along the down-hill road, and with secrets darkly involving many women of many lands, buried within his breast; a mysterious being prone to setting his teeth firm and giving hard laughs, and within whose eyes would burn a cruel light, such as may have burnt within the eyes of the pirate kings of old, when resolving to carry off another man's wife, or commit any other deed of high and knightly enterprise.

This, I repeat, had Mr. Clarendon Whyte been capable of describing himself on paper, was about the measure of hero he would have portrayed, and this was the tone in which he ordinarily spoke of himself to women. Among men he gave it to be understood that he was one of "The Five," and as no one knew in the least what "The Five" meant, the assertion was allowed to pass current. He had been, or said he had been, in India some years back, and would speak vaguely when smoking the midnight pipe—chiefly, I think, when no old Indians were by—of the tigers he had held by the throat, and the

wild boars with whom he had held single combat in the deadly jungles of Bengal. But the society of men was not much sought by Clarendon Whyte generally. The antagonism which at the first moment of their meeting sprang up between him and Steven, was an example of the sort of instinctive distaste that generally existed between Mr. Clarendon Whyte and his fellow-men.

Men, as a rule, are grossly callous to the charms of *hommes incompris*, grossly apt to call them by the commonplace name of impostors. Who was Clarendon Whyte? If he had been a tiger slayer in the jungle, why didn't he hunt a bit in England instead of dividing his time in lavender gloves between Piccadilly and the Brighton Cliff? If he had drank so hard and played so high formerly, why was he so moderate now? Where were his great relations? where was his extravagance? where were his vices? So spoke the jealous voice of men; but with a good many weak women, Dora Fane among them, this carpet-knight was a very great hero indeed. Dora was artificial to such an extent that none but artificial characters had the power to affect her. The simple manhood of a man like Steven made no mark on her perceptions. Fine dress, and big words,

and martial music, and the glare of the footlights, were all required before Dot could see anything worth admiring in man or woman. Steven Lawrence's clothes were ill-cut; his boots thick; his hands brown. During the whole of this first evening he never spoke once of his adventures, or of his prowess, or of himself in any way; and at his own modest valuation Dot was quite ready to take him. This beautiful being with his faultless coat, Jouvin gloves, scented locks, and Mephistophelian whispers (only Dot never thought so long a word) she took at his. To her, Clarendon Whyte was Bayard and Mr. Rochester and Gordon Cumming all in one: a mighty hunter, a knight without fear and without reproach, and yet with unfathomable wickedness giving a gorgeous unholy glitter to his bravery and his knighthood. Never had he, by force of contrast probably, seemed so irresistible to her as on this evening of Steven's arrival. She knew very well indeed that Mr. Whyte never meant to marry her; knew very well that she meant, her gods aiding her, to marry Steven; and still about as much emotion as she was capable of passed through her heart at the tender reproach, real or acted, which she read in Mr. Clarendon Whyte's last words.

"I—I really don't know that Mr. Lawrence's attentions are likely to be offered to any one," she answered, with a forced laugh. "He seems more taken up with the thought of returning to Kent than anything else. You know, of course, that his land is in our parish?"

"A—market gardener, I think you said?" drawled Mr. Whyte; "or a farrier, was it? I really forget."

"A farrier!" said Dot, biting her lip with vexation. "How malicious you are, Mr. Whyte. The Lawrences are people who have lived on their own land for generations. Yeoman-farmers, we call them. People, in their class, very much respected in the neighbourhood."

"In their class—yes—no doubt," answered Mr. Whyte, smoothing his moustache into points. "People who fulfil every duty of life, of course, and eventually have their merits as fathers and husbands recorded, on white uprights, in the village churchyard. Unfortunately, their class is not our class. But forgive me, Miss Fane! What right have I to speak of this man?—what right have I to be jealous—to have any feeling at all in your affairs?"

Dot bent down her head and pretended to


trace out, with one small finger, the elaborate pattern on her Mechlin handkerchief. When she raised her face to Mr. Whyte's, tears, that were not wholly false, stood in her eyes. "I am wretched," she said, in a whisper, and with a quiver of her lip. "Why should I hide it from you? This—this—I won't say his name, but he *has* returned all the way from America for my sake. I sent him my photograph, and he's never had a night's sleep since; and as you may see for yourself, they are all trying to bring it on. Oh, Mr. Whyte, if you would but help me with your opinion! I would act in everything as you wished!"

If the expression of her face was acted, it was wonderfully pretty acting, much above Dora's general quality of art. Her lips really quivered—her tiny hands trembled as they lay clasped above the white morsel of lace on her lap. "I think I've known you long enough to look upon you as a friend," she murmured; "I think I know you well enough to be sure that you won't refuse me your advice."

Mr. Clarendon Whyte bent down over Dora Fane, and whispered his answer in her ear: an answer which made her heart beat, and her face brighten; but which, if put into

words and divested of the adjuncts of *ess bouquet*, unfathomable eyes, and all the other powerful charms of Mr. Whyte's presence, came about to this: "That he supposed Miss Fane would be at the opera to-morrow—better time—er; fellow looks as if he was half listening—er." But it is surprising how aptly the imaginations of women supply language, grammar, passion, eloquence! for the men who are their peers. Fancy a simple-hearted fellow like Steven essaying to murmur imbecile monosyllables into even the most foolish woman's ear, and meeting with success! A Bond Street tailor, Parisian perfumery, embroidered linen, and a certain prestige are all wanted before women like Dora Fane will admit the possibility of a man's fascination. The millinery department accomplished, and the seal of their own particular clique set upon it, and the eloquence of Burke would, to their apprehension, be no more comparable with the soft nothings of a Mr. Clarendon Whyte than the Venus of Milo would be comparable in their sight with a lay-figure dressed in the last new mode at Descou's. Are such women very far removed in capacity from young children, and does not a child think the squeak of his own speaking "Topsy" the

finest language in the world? Does he not discover emotions which to us are mute—endearment, anger, reconciliation—in the sounds which he makes his puppet give forth? Dora Fane was, I think, no exceptionally stupid or frivolous woman, but a common example of an enormously common class; just sharp enough to supply a constant stream of passable very small talk, without an idea in life beyond the narrowest gossip of society; no sympathy with any thing or person out of herself; all the great interests of humanity a sealed book to her; all nature, earth and sea and sky, a blank—save, perhaps, as a background to herself, in Watteau-like attitudes, during the autumn months. And Dora Fane seemed to reach, with geometrical nicety, the intellectual altitude, not only of Mr. Clarendon Whyte, but of the mass of young men whom she met either in town or country. “Katharine Fane is out and out the handsomest,” was the opinion invariably passed upon the comparative merits of the cousins; a woman that any fellow bent on matrimony would like to see at the head of his table; but Dora Fane is the one to get on with at a ball. Light on hand—lots in her! the kind of girl that you never feel at a loss with anywhere.”



This was the opinion of all the ornamental men, the Clarendon Whytes of the world. So poor little Dot had her groove; and it is difficult to say whether higher education, higher intelligence, would have fitted her for it more accurately.

In an hour's time Mr. Clarendon Whyte, having drank several cups of tea and murmured more eloquence into Dora's ear, bowed himself away; then Steven, as soon as the other was well out of the house, rose also, and took his leave.

"Don't forget to-morrow," said Katharine, kindly. "Lord Petres will give you the number of our box, and don't be late, mind—not a minute after eight, or you will miss Patti in the second scene."

She half followed him to the door, stretching out her hand to him anew as she said this; and Steven, forgetting the others, carried the beautiful gracious face, the warm hand-pressure away with him into the London streets!

"You were not too civil, Bella," said Katharine. Dot, with a yawn, having taken herself away at once to her own room.

"I thought you might very well have asked him to dinner."



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rence's grandfather was a noble old man—just a simple yeoman, and so it seems to me not very far from one's idea of a gentleman! Joshua, under his wife's influence, deteriorated, because occasionally he aped being fine; and young Josh was simply shocking! with his fast, town-cut coats, and tandems, and affectations of the worst forms of London slang. Steven, I should think, would be like his grandfather as he grows older. He's a very handsome man, Bella!"

"Of a certain style, Kate. He'll look very well down at Ashcot in leather gaiters, and with a pitchfork across his broad shoulders on his way to the fields—"

"When he is Dot's husband, you mean."

Mrs. Dering coloured a little. "If Dot was to marry Steven Lawrence, or any other decent man who could support her, you and I should be the last people, Katharine, to cavil at her taste. As years go on we shall be the people to suffer most if she does not marry, and she's looking terrible old already—I don't think I ever noticed it as I did this evening—bella donna in the eyes always must tell at last! In reality, I don't suppose that she is older than me, but in another year, if she goes on as she has done lately, she'll look fifty, you'll see, Kate."

"A pleasant prospect for Mr. Lawrence!" said Katharine, "though, I must say, I think we are arranging their marriage a little prematurely. I don't know that it's a positive certainty Steven Lawrence wants to marry into our family at all."

"He must want it," said Mrs. Dering, decisively. "All men of that class want to marry above them if they have a chance. Besides, Dot will have a thousand pounds paid down to her on her wedding-day, and a thousand pounds, after the manner in which the land has been neglected of late years, will be a very nice sum for Lawrence to put upon his farm. He would never have written to her as he did unless he meant something; and the way he held aloof from her to-night shows, from a man like that, what he feels."

"Does it, indeed?" said Katharine. "Then, men 'like that' have a very odd way of showing their feelings! May I ask, Bella—knowing that Steven Lawrence would be here—why you brought Mr. Whyte home with you? If we want Dot to marry Steven Lawrence, or any one else, it seems to me that to have Mr. Clarendon Whyte hanging about her as he does is the very last way to attain our object."

"I brought him—because he wished to come!" answered Mrs. Dering, carelessly. "The reason for which I ever have him at the house at all, Clarendon Whyte has the most ill-natured tongue in London when he chooses, and—"

"You are afraid of him!" cried Katharine, as her sister hesitated. "Now, that is a thing I never can understand in you, Bella. Why be afraid of anybody? What can Mr. Clarendon Whyte, or any other man, say to hurt you and the children? I'm afraid of no one, I'm happy to say, and I never shall be."

"Wait till you have seen as much of life as I have, Kate," said Mrs. Dering. "A woman can never be above caring for the opinion of the world."

"We are speaking of Clarendon Whyte," said Katharine. "I should be proud of the ill-opinion of a world made up of Clarendon Whytes. He is a *petit-maitre*. Thank heaven, our English language does not stoop to coin a word for such men! Could anything be more detestable than his manner to Steven Lawrence, a guest in your house, Bella? However, Lord Petres will make up for it. Lord Petres, so much I know of him, will be just as courteous to a man of Lawrence's birth as he would be to a prince.

Lord Petres shall call on him to-morrow."

"My dear Katharine!"

"My dear Bella, go off to your bed, please, and don't try to argue with me. I am going to write a note to Lord Petres this instant, to be sent to him the first thing to-morrow. You are not thinking, at this time in the morning, of interfering with my love-letters, are you, Bella?"

"I think it quite unnecessary to make so much of Steven Lawrence," said Mrs. Dering; "and if it was any one but you, Kate, I certainly should argue. We might wait, at least, till we are sure of Dora's mind before exhibiting him to every one we know as our future cousin. However, it won't last, Kate!" This was a parting shaft as Mrs. Dering prepared to leave the room.

"Take this backwoodsman to the opera, get Lord Petres to walk with him arm and arm down Piccadilly, ask him to dinner—I give you *carte blanche*, my dear—and see if you will have had enough of the man in three days or not? 'Le Roi est mort—vive le Roi!' is never more applicable than to your favourites, Katharine. A fortnight ago, do you remember how angry you were with me for not taking the poet-tailor to drive with us in the Park?"

"I remember," said Katharine. "We took Clarendon Whyte instead: the tailor's block instead of the tailor himself. Good night, Bella."

For five or six minutes after she was alone Katharine Fane stood motionless, with clasped hands and downcast face, in the place beside the hearth where Mrs. Dering had left her; then suddenly she stooped, picked up the bunch of faded violets that Steven had thrown away, and raised them to her face. Some sweetness was in them still; and Katharine held them a minute or more (could Steven have known it!) close to her lips; then, one by one, picked them asunder, and threw each, with a little quick scornful gesture, into the fire.

"Steven Lawrence," she thought, half speaking his name aloud. "Lawrence of Ashcot, to have—have mistaken me for Dot and I obliged to forgive him! Dot shall never know what a humiliating part I have had to play for her sake."

And then she crossed to a writing-table, and, without hesitating for a word, wrote the following note to her lover:

"MY DEAR LORD PETRES,—Steven Lawrence, the young farmer I told you of,

arrived from America to-day. Will you call on him please to-morrow morning, and show him some little kindness, if it won't bore you too much? He is at the Charing Cross Hotel. I'm glad you enjoyed the Atcherleys' dinner. Thanks for the box for to-morrow.

“Your affectionate,

“KATHARINE.

“Let Steven Lawrence know the number of the box. You remember the little romance I told you of, about him and Dot?”

## CHAPTER VII.

### STEVEN'S RIVAL.

STEVEN walked along the London streets that night like a man walking in his sleep. The gas, and the faces the gas shone upon; the crowds streaming out from the different theatres; the flaring open-windowed supper-rooms—the whole outside midnight brilliancy of the civilization from which he been divorced so long, were present before him; but only as the narrow ledge along which he treads in unconscious safety is present before the bodily perceptions of the sleep-walker.

All that Steven saw in the spirit was Katharine's smile; all that he felt was the parting pressure of her hand; and with his heart fixed on her, like Christian's on the shining figures at the gate, he smoked his cigar quietly along Piccadilly and the Haymarket; then took a turn or two up and down the Strand, and when he got back to



the Charing Cross Hotel and to his rest, just fell asleep as placidly as he used to do in the woods with his saddle under his head for a pillow, dry leaves and moss for his bed, and heaven above for his roof!

Not until the next morning came: not until he had dressed and gone down into the great bare coffee-room, where two or three lonely men like himself stood dismally looking out, as far apart from each other as possible, through the windows: did the intoxication of Miss Fane's presence begin to pass away, or Steven to ask himself, with a start, what fool's part this was that he was playing? Miss Fane possessed a gracious smile, a beautiful hand—belonging to whom? Standing, with his arms moodily folded at the farthest window in the room, Steven occupied himself for half-an-hour or more over the solution of this pleasant problem, the bearing it was likely to have upon his own life—and so rapt in his own thoughts was he, that a waiter bearing a card upon a salver, and with a marked access of respect in tone and manner, had to address him three times before he could be made to understand that a gentleman had called to see him, and was now waiting at the coffee-room door.

"Lord Petres," said Steven, stooping to read, but not touching the card, and with the blood rising to his face—a second before he had been wishing Lord Petres in a very different place to the Charing Cross Hotel. "Ask him in, of course. Didn't you know I was here?"

Upon which the waiter went out, with fine breeding hiding the card in his own hand on the road so that my lord should not see the ignorant contumely with which it had been received; and a minute later ushered up my lord himself, hat in hand, along the coffee-room to the place where Steven, his back to the fire, his handsome head well in the air, stood and waited for him superbly.

Lord Petres, whose life for the last five and twenty years had been spent as much in Paris as in London, possessed, with plenty of good English heartiness, all the fluent easy graces of a Frenchman in such matters as salutation and self-introduction; and Steven, quick as men of his class always are, in recognising the presence of a gentleman, felt half his prejudices disarmed in a moment against Katharine's lover.

"How are you, Lawrence?" shaking his hand; "very glad indeed to see you in England. Ten years you've been away—ah!

you'll find a good many things changed; climate same as ever, you see. Thank you," as Steven pushed up an arm-chair for him, "but not too near the fire. I'm in very delicate health, Lawrence, and these east winds play the mischief with me. If you will let me, I'll take off my scarf." Saying which he sat down, unbuttoned his great-coat, and took off an enormous woollen shawl, which was tightly wrapped round his throat and face. "I have Wentworth for my chest—but I believe in none of them—and he tells me my left lung is touched, and I must shield myself from fog—morning fog especially; and I've Bright for my liver, and he tells me I must walk constantly in the fresh air—morning air, especially; so between them I'm reduced, as you see, to traversing the streets like a mummy. If you have a good constitution, Lawrence, thank Heaven for the best of gifts. You see in me a wreck—a complete wreck."

And Lord Petres smiled—a feeble, pleasant little smile; and taking off a pair of lined seal-skin gloves, held out his hands, fragile and white as a woman's, towards the fire.

Steven gazed down at him in a sort of wonder, and without finding a word to utter.

"I must strike you as looking ill, I am sure," said Lord Petres, earnestly. "People who see me often of course are no judges, and I'm so harassed and tossed about by the conflicting opinions of the surgeons, that to have the fresh opinion of a stranger, like yourself, would be worth anything to me. Now, do I look to you seriously diseased? meeting me, without prejudice of any sort, would you say, 'that man's liver is gone,' or not? I should be excessively obliged to you, Lawrence, if you could collect your thoughts on the subject and answer me honestly."

"Well, I'm not much used to sickness myself," said Steven; "and another thing, I'm so accustomed to live among men with skins tanned as brown as my own, that every one I see in cities is likely to strike me as pale-faced. Certainly, seeing you for the first time, I should say—"

"Lawrence, I ask you, solemnly, not to hesitate."

"Well, then, I should say I thought you had something the matter with you; but of course it would be beyond me in every way to guess what your complaint was."

"Ah!" cried Lord Petres, with resignation, "if the doctors would only confess as much. If they would accept my wretched

state of health as a fact, and not attempt to theorise upon it, what I should be saved, I don't speak from a commercial point of view only—what I should be saved in pernicious drugs, fruitless deprivations, early rising ! Lawrence, you have, I know, been leading a wild kind of life of late—the only life fit for a man to live—and until you get into a state like mine, a state of chronic dyspepsia, aggravated by all that science can effect, you'll never know what civilization is. I am a martyr to erroneous British systems, past and present. My wretched digestion I inherit from men whose powers were exhausted by our national kitchen ; my present aggravated condition has been achieved by the drugs of our national pharmacopœia. It's the fashion to say that England in a hundred years will have sunk into insignificance through the exhaustion of her coal. I'll tell you my opinion, sir ; England, in half the time, will have passed into a state of decadence through her melted butter. I speak strongly on this point because I feel about it strongly. A nation as behindhand as England in the first essential art of civilization, must have in her constitution the deadliest seeds of decay. You agree with me ?”

Lord Petres was a small man with a snow-

white solemn face; ink-black hair, already worn upon the forehead and temples; a slow syllabic fashion of talking (or rather enunciating; he never spoke save to give out thoroughly well-digested opinions), and certain little marked eccentricities of dress and gait that for five and twenty years, at least, had made him a well-known character in the streets of London and Paris. A valetudinarian from humour rather than necessity, the employment of every hour of the twenty-four was appointed by him beforehand. His life was regular as a dial. Exercise, meals, digestion, study; the society of men; the society of women; everything with Lord Petres had its allotted season and time of duration; and the only thing ever known to ruffle him was when any of the unavoidable chances or changes of human life sent him, perforce, an inch or so out of his accustomed orbit.

In the first days of his engagement to Katharine Fane—an engagement, it is just to say, entirely brought about by Mrs. Dering, not by either of the principal people concerned in it: marriage had ever been the one point in social economy upon which Lord Petres' opinions were hazy, if not positively unfavourable—in the first days of his en-

gagement, following conventional decrees rather than any natural impulse, Lord Petres really suffered the even tenor of his life to be upset. Suffered his forenoon studies to be broken in upon; took exercise when he should have digested; digested, or rather did not digest, when he ought to have taken exercise. On one great occasion, the effects of which he says he will bear with him to his grave, allowed himself to be carried away to a high tea at half-past six, and to the Lyceum Theatre and Mr. Fechter afterwards. But this was the last day of Lord Petres' love-making. With the frankness that was his nature, and with great delicacy, he explained to Katharine the next afternoon, how utterly wild and impossible it was that this state of things could continue. "In accepting me," he said, "you have conferred on me the highest compliment that can be conferred on any man, but to clothe a beggar in purple would be a doubtful benefit if, at the same time, you deprived him of his daily food. Regularity, to a shattered frame like mine, is what food and drink are to the healthy. You are too unprejudiced, Miss Fane, I am sure to hold to any of those empty forms and ceremonies which the common

run of persons in our position seem to look upon as necessary."

And Katharine, with suspicious readiness, having given him back his liberty, Lord Petres' life from that hour flowed back into its accustomed channels. He wrote her charming little aphoristic letters, touching slightly on love, when they were parted. When they were in London together, spent three quarters of an hour regularly, each afternoon, in her society; and in every other respect led precisely the same life as if no Katharine Fane existed. Balls and operas, save on the rarest occasions, had never been his habitude. In his way, and as much as a man to whom gastronomy is the crowning object of life can be said to study, Lord Petres studied: read up, that is to say, from about one in the day till three, in whatever for the time being was his pet idea—religious, social, or political—and made annotations upon his reading for the great work into which during the last twenty years his opinions had been accumulating. At four, regularly, he walked; the length of the Boulevards des Italiens in Paris, once up and down Regent Street and the entire length of Piccadilly in London. At six, the club—for one hour. At five and twenty minutes



past seven to a second—dinner. In the evening, save when his friends dined with him, the club again; and in his bed by twelve.

There was thus, strictly speaking, no margin left for female society in the programme of his existence, save by infringing on the hours of exercise, or of the club, before dinner. In his youth, he said, he had amassed quite sufficient facts in connection with that branch of human life. The work fitted for a man's middle years in matters of this nature was to condense, and theorise from the experience of the past. And his engagement to the most beautiful woman in London had, as I have said, been insufficient to swerve him for longer than a week from this opinion.

Among men his popularity was universal. In his own set, and outside of it, among Englishmen and Frenchmen, among Protestant bishops, and Papist priests, no man was ever heard to speak a bad word of little Lord Petres. A certain sturdy independence formed, perhaps, the basis of this popularity. A man, governed by the conventionalities, must perforce, and from the very essence of his creed, sacrifice his friends sometimes. Nothing but death could, by possibility, destroy one of Lord Petres' friendships. Let a man he had once

called his friend have exhausted every conceivable folly, have spent the last shilling of his fortune, Lord Petres, until the police or the bailiffs had him, would just as soon walk arm in arm with the poor fellow down St. James's Street as though he were the honestest or the wealthiest man of his acquaintance. He was no more a respecter of reputations than of persons. When he liked a man—it would be more accurate to say, when a man suited him as a companion—lack of character, of fortune, or of birth, was to Lord Petres a matter of the most profound and thorough indifference. There was no affectation, no assumption, of any generous feeling whatsoever in this. The representative of one of the oldest and wealthiest Catholic families in the kingdom, it really never occurred to Lord Petres, as it does to self-made men, to inquire whether his friends were well-born or not. A thorough philosopher, after his own small fashion, he was beautifully, genuinely, indifferent to all vices and to all virtues that did not directly interfere with himself. Had the best friend he possessed burst in upon him with some tale of disgrace or ruin at dinner-time, the best friend would, I believe, have received scanty compassion at Lord Petres' hands.

A man, he said of himself, whose troubled secretions scarcely permitted him to digest, under the most favourable circumstances, was not to be wantonly molested by any of the smaller accidents of life at the most important hour of the twenty-four. But let his friend wait for a fitting and decent season wherein to ask his advice, and Lord Petres would not only give it—very excellent advice too!—but be quite ready to walk arm in arm with the delinquent before every club-window in town, could such public demonstration of friendship be of service to him. And men, knowing exactly how he must be taken, respected both his foibles and himself. Thoroughness, whether in a missionary priest or in a sybarite epicurean, cannot exist without making its weight felt. Little Lord Petres was thorough to the core. You could predict, with mathematical certainty, how he would act towards you in any position in which you or he could be placed. As he had been for the last five-and-twenty years, so he would continue in valetudinarianism, friendship, love of eating, shape of hats, and general philosophy to the last. And in an age of garish haste and hurry like the present—an age when the majority of human institutions seem to have about as much chance of

abiding as the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope—the contemplation of a character like this carries with it a charm to which men, amidst the turmoil and fever of their own lives, can scarcely fail of being sensible.

Lord Petres' white face, his placid little smile, his philosophic little mind (less agitated ordinarily about passing political events than about the probable state of the world in the year 2,000), the very shape of the hat you know so well, seemed always to bring to you a sense of repose and stability whenever you came across him. Some one said once that Lord Petres and Nôtre Dame were the only things in Paris that M. Hausmann had not been able to metamorphose. Progressive and republican, theoretically, to the most Utopian degree, he was, in his own person, the very incarnation of Conservatism. With views that rivalled the broadest German school in theology, he confessed and went to mass regularly every Easter. With theories in politics outstripping Bright and Beales, he attended scrupulously in the House whenever the Conservative party, to which he traditionally belonged, required his vote. "Few things that a man does," he would say, "have the smallest effect, one way or the other, on the world's progress, but the most insignifi-

cant person can help or retard progress by his thoughts." And so, securing peace to himself by outward allegiance to the beliefs in which he had been reared, Lord Petres had worked on and on, during half his lifetime, at his great book on reform : a book which, when published—fifty years after his death, his will directs—will, I suspect, find the world yet unripe for the changes, social, religious, and political, which it advocates.

"You go with me, Lawrence, I hope? There can scarcely be a worse sign for a nation than this, that in the nineteenth century it has not conquered the rudiments of the first great art of civilization. In our day we have had our use, as the mammoth and the mastodon had once, but we have not in us the germs of further progress. By help of our coal, and with brute force or dogged obstinacy, we have beaten iron into shape, and woven cotton into cloth, for the use of other nations; but there we stop. We can sustain life, but we cannot render it enduring. We furnish the knife to slay the bullock, the cloth for the table, and then we serve up the beast, charred and gory, at our national feasts. You agree with me?"

"I believe I agree with the English people generally," said Steven, not without a smile.

In the levity engendered by youth, ignorance, and unbounded digestion, cooking to him was the least important of subjects. "For myself, a venison steak broiled over a wood-fire, a buck's head baked in an earth oven, a partridge or quail quickly roasted, and a snatch of cassava bread, have been my diet for years, with a mug of black coffee, as long as our coffee held out, to wash it down."

A look almost of excitement came across Lord Petres' impassive face. "Lawrence," said he, earnestly, "I'm delighted to have met you! Sit down, pray. This conversation is most interesting to me. At the present moment I am endeavouring to work out an idea—not original, nothing's original—but an idea too much neglected by writers on art generally, which is that the perfection of cookery is, in many cases, to be sought, not by striving after new combinations, but by reverting to the instinctive, untaught science of the simple hunter in the woods. Your remark confirms all that I have been writing on the subject. You speak of a venison steak smoking hot from the embers, of small game quickly roasted, of a buck's head cooked by slow and gradual heat. Good God, sir! do you not know that all this is the

*ne plus ultra* of intuitive science? bearing out with accuracy the axiom of the immortal Savarin, that 'On devient cuisinier mais on naît rôtiisseur.'"

"I don't know French," said Steven, "except a few words I picked up in the Canadian backwoods once; but I know our food used to taste deuced good to us in the forests or out prairie-hunting. Still, I can't say I ever enjoyed anything more than some cold beef and pickles that I ate when I landed in Southampton yesterday. After living on wild flesh as I have done for years, I believe plain English beef and mutton will be a treat to me, ill-cooked or well-cooked."

Lord Petres looked with a sort of mild envy at the yeoman's iron-knit frame and healthy weather-tanned face. "Youth, and the perpetual spring of spirits arising from good digestion, make you speak like that, Lawrence. You have lived in pure air, eaten digestible food, and abstained from the poison of the wine-merchants so long that you can speak lightly of the worst cares and burthens of civilization. Let me solemnly warn you not to tax your digestive powers too far. Even with the finest constitution, the stomach will give way in time before the meats—I refrain from calling them dishes—

of ordinary English life. Cold beef and pickles, for once and under certain conditions of the stomach, may be a dinner for a prince. But cold beef and pickles for a year—”

“Would be food as good as I require,” said Steven, cheerily; “varied sometimes by spinach and bacon, or a cut at a juicy leg of mutton, with a glass of home-brewed ale afterwards. Good cookery—your fine French fricasees and wines—would be lost upon me, I guess.”

Lord Petres looked thoughtful for a minute. “May I ask you, Lawrence,” he said, at last, “what you are thinking of ordering for your breakfast this morning? You must not think me impertinent—I have a special object in making the inquiry.”

“Ordering for breakfast!” said Steven, opening his blue eyes. “Well, I don’t know, I’m sure. I never thought about it. Whatever they give the other fellows, I suppose. I’m not at all particular.”

“Then will you come and breakfast with me? If you had ordered anything I would not have asked you, for I know myself there’s nothing more painful than to submit to another man’s taste when you have already made up your mind, prepared your faculties,



as it were, for any particular task of assimilation. I've got a French fellow whose powers I should like you to give me your opinion of; and, as I don't breakfast till eleven, we can take a stroll, if you are so minded, on our way to my lodgings."

The French fellow was an artist who, it was calculated, profited by about one-seventh of his master's yearly income; an artist who, as Lord Petres presently explained to Steven, exercised an autocratic sway not only over his table, but over every social condition of his life.

"But for Duclos, indeed, Lawrence," he said, as they were walking away from the hotel, "you would probably have now found me a much happier man than I am. Considerations connected with this rascal alone prevented me from breaking up my bachelor establishment last February. I speak to you as an old friend of the family, you understand?"

Steven walked on in silence, his steady stride bearing little Lord Petres along much as a powerful steam-tug would convoy a light schooner yacht. Considerations connected with a French cook prevented Katharine Fane at this minute from being Lady Petres! and he suffered the man's arm to rest in his,

was accepting his first offer of hospitality, nay, more, felt in his heart that Lord Petres was a good fellow, and that there was sympathy between them such as, when he looked at Clarendon Whyte last night, he would have sworn could never exist between him and any fine London gentleman extant ! Was Lord Petres above or below his jealousy, or what ?

"If it wouldn't inconvenience you, Lawrence, would you be good enough to slacken your pace a little ? Thank you. In the delicate state of my different organs, I am expressly forbidden ever to get out of breath. Yes, I speak to you as a friend of the family. I know you have been acquainted with the Fanes for years, longer than I have myself, indeed. Now, how do you find them looking ? Dora is prettier than ever, isn't she ?"

"I don't believe I remember her enough to say," answered Steven, promptly. "She certainly is not very good-looking now, to my mind. I don't care for these little women like dolls."

"*Voilà où nous en sommes !*" thought Lord Petres. "Katharine at her usual occupation ! I believe I agree with you, Lawrence ; still as a little woman, and in a certain style, Dora Fane is to be admired. She always seems to me so well suited for an entresol.

Your big women dwarf low rooms, and require a massive style of furniture, frequently out of keeping with your establishment. Now, Katharine Fane—— But 'tis a shame to talk of handsome women fasting, and in an east wind. The subject should be introduced, like a glass of Tokay or Grande Chartreuse, in the first and pleasantest stage of digestive reverie."

"East wind or west, on a full stomach, or a fasting one, I could give my opinion of Miss Fane," said Steven, stoutly. "She is handsomer than any woman I ever saw before, and seems to me simple and good as she is handsome."

"May the Lord help you!" thought Lord Petres, giving a look of pity at Steven's flushing cheek. "Katharine Fane starting with the rôle of simplicity on a man like this. They are charming women, all three—Dora, Katharine, and Mrs. Dering; Mrs. Dering, especially, has the finest-cut shoulders of any woman I know. You couldn't have better people to run about with, if you wish to see a little of how we all live in London. By-the-bye, I've a message for you—something about a box at one of the theatres this evening."

"Miss Fane was good enough to ask me

last night," said Steven, "and I accepted; but I don't believe I can go. I don't know how men dress in cities. I've nothing belonging to me but a couple of rough suits I bought in Vera Cruz before I sailed." To a Mr. Clarendon Whyte, Steven's pride would never have allowed him to make the confession; but something about Lord Petres set him as thoroughly and unconsciously at his ease, as he had been over-night in the society of Katharine Fane.

"At the London opera it's the fashion, and a very disgusting fashion too, to go in full dress—white tie, black suit, like the young gentlemen in the haberdashers' shops. Now I don't think a coat of mine would fit you?"

"Not exactly," said Steven, with his hearty laugh.

"And the time is short for getting anything made. However, I'll tell you what we can do: we'll walk round to my tailor in Bond Street, and, if he can do nothing for you himself, he'll tell us exactly who will. Everything can be had, of a kind, in London in half an hour, if one only knows where to go for it."

The grand Bond Street tailor, who, on the strength of Steven's own merits, would probably not have taken the trouble to make

a coat for him at all, was all complacency and condescension to the friend of Lord Petres; not only taking the yeoman's measure for a morning suit and frock-coat, but faithfully promising that he should be in a position to appear at Covent Garden that night. This settled, Lord Petres took out his watch and found that there was exactly time, with two minutes to spare, for them to reach his lodgings by eleven o'clock.

"A great philosopher has said," he remarked, taking Steven's arm again, "that the discovery of a new dish does far more for human happiness than the discovery of a new star; and it always seems to me that the least we can offer to men who spend their life in culinary research, is the poor return of punctuality. Since Duclos has been good enough to cook for me I've never been late yet, and have had no cause to regret my attention to his feelings. Only once did he make me wait, and that was in Paris, on the evening after the coup d'état. He kept me more than half an hour; but you see, Lawrence, a good many of his relations had been shot in the course of the day, and I suppose—well," said little Lord Petres, "I suppose, in periods of political excitement, much must be forgiven—to a Frenchman."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A QUESTION FOR THE FUTURE.

LORD PETRES' "lodging" consisted of a first-floor suite of rooms, on the sunny side of St. James's Street; rooms furnished with such luxury as Steven had never seen or imagined in his life. Velvet-piled carpets, Flemish hangings, Venetian glass, Florentine bronzes—everything most costly and most artistic of its kind, was to be found in Lord Petres' bachelor lodgings. Piled-up wood-fires—one of his eccentricities was an utter intolerance of coal—blazed on every hearth. A profusion of flowers in the double windows, frescoed medallions of fruits and garlands on the walls, Louis Seize furniture, tapestried in white and gold, gave the rooms almost the lightness and grace of a Parisian apartment. In a small inner cabinet, lined with books and pictures, Lord Petres' morning room and study, the breakfast equipage was laid on a little round table drawn close

beside the fire, before which an enormous Persian cat, with a leather collar round his neck, lay outstretched and asleep.

"You are hungry, I hope, Lawrence?" said Lord Petres, when he had taken off his wraps. "This accursed fog has not poisoned your system to such an extent that, like me, you are indisposed from taking food?"

"Not in the least," said Steven. "I have been in much worse fogs for weeks together, in the fall, and never felt my hunger decrease in the slightest. When you have seen me eat, you will say that mine isn't the kind of appetite to be affected by such small accidents as east wind or fog."

And he took his place, not without a feeling of misgiving, at the little table, whose Sèvres and silver, and fragile graceful *épergnes* of flowers, all spoke more plainly, he thought, of "fine French *fricasees*" and refinement than of the good robust kind of meal which at this moment his keen morning appetite cried aloud to receive.

"If you care to know what we are going to eat, here is the bill of fare," said Lord Petres, handing him a slip of rose-coloured paper that lay beside his own plate. "With an enfeebled constitution like mine, it's necessary that I should know what is coming,

in order to select the one or two dishes that may happen to tempt my fancy. To a man in good health, who is in the hands of a decent cook, I always say eat straight on, heedless of the past and of the future. Surprise is better than anticipation to robust nerves and an unvitiated digestion."

"Whether I look at the list or whether I don't, 'twill be much the same to me," said Steven, vainly endeavouring to decipher a syllable of the little cramped French hand, in which the menu was written; "I'm never good at handwriting, and if I could make out a syllable of this, which I can't, I should not know what it was about. *Roti*, is French for roast, I remember, and *cuit à la grille*, for broiled. That is about as much as I know, and if you were to give me a hundred pounds I couldn't tell you how to spell either. I am a man wholly without education, Lord Petres," laying the paper down, and looking steadily, yet not without a heightened colour, at his host.

"Without book education," said Lord Petres, in his pleasant little way, "and a d—— good thing for you, Lawrence! Life is the only book I ever got any knowledge worth a shilling from yet. When you get to my age and can no longer study life at first



hand, it will be quite time enough for you to study it in books."

The clock on the mantelpiece, accompanied with mathematical precision by three or four clocks in the adjoining apartments, now struck eleven, and at the ninth stroke, exactly, the door opened, and the first course of the breakfast was brought in. "Help yourself, Lawrence," said Lord Petres. "You must excuse me from eating. I can talk, if it affords you any amusement, but I have not the least appetite to-day." And so, during the first course and the second, through fricandeaux and salmis, fish, flesh, and fowl, disguised under every delicate form by which art could seek to tempt an appetite no longer to be tempted, did Steven eat alone! Lord Petres occasionally taking a tiny morsel on his plate, and playing with it with his knife and fork, but not swallowing an ounce of food during the whole meal. When the fruit was put upon the table, he counted out twelve strawberries on his plate, ate them, with a quarter of a slice of French roll, and drank one glass of Madeira. The first dish that had tempted the worn-out sated epicure was, after all, the dish for which M. Duclos' art had done nothing, and nature all!

Of Steven it is not too much to say that

an entirely new world had opened before him during the hour or so which Lord Petres' breakfast had occupied. Just as to eyes that had never seen the beauty and the grace of womanhood, the magic of Katharine's presence last night was as a glimpse of some hitherto-unimagined Paradise; so to a palate that for ten years had never tasted any save the simple food of the wilderness, this perfection of gastronomic art was a new and overpowering revelation of life's possibilities. At the risk of lowering Steven in some readers' interest, I must say boldly that his temperament was essentially that of a *bon vivant* by predestination. Fresh in heart and body as a child, he was keenly, fervidly ready for every pleasant thing the world could afford him—from the smiles of beautiful lips down even to the cotelettes and the filets, the sauces and the salmis, of Monsieur Duclos. When he spoke an hour ago of cold beef and pickles contenting him, he spoke in the same kind of blind ignorance which used to lead him, before he got Katharine's photograph, into thinking every robust, fresh-coloured young woman he saw in the back-wood settlements a divinity. We are too much accustomed to confuse want of experience with want of capacity. Steven, with

the present ignorance of a Red Indian, had in him perceptions only needing practice to ripen into the perfection of refined taste; perceptions more keenly delicate than those of half the ultra-civilized men you meet. His limited vocabulary and modest distrust as to the worth of his own opinions withheld him from much speech; but in the few words he did speak—in the fine discrimination he showed respecting sauces—in the very way he tasted his wine before he drank it, Lord Petres recognised a man to whom, as education advanced, food might not be the mere gross sustenance of animal existence, but a sentiment—a science: an end, not a means in life. And the predilection which, from the first moment of seeing him, he had experienced towards Steven Lawrence, increased proportionately.

After breakfast came coffee—a subject on which Steven knew sufficient not only to feel but to speak; then tobacco; finally, when the one o'clock sun had slowly pierced through the London mist and was filling the rooms with friendly warmth and brightness, Lord Petres led the way back to the subject he had pronounced too sacred for fog and east wind in the forenoon.

“We were speaking, I think, of Mrs.

Dering, Lawrence, when we broke off? Let us resume the subject in order. Mrs. Dering, I was observing to you, has the finest-cut shoulders of any woman in London. Did you remark them?"

"I remarked little else," said Steven. "Mrs. Dering turned her shoulders upon me from the moment she entered the room, I think, until I left it."

"And you admired them?"

"I don't admire her. I don't care for these very big women."

"Any more than for these very small ones? I see how it is, Lawrence. With Katharine Fane in the room, you have no eyes for any other woman. Her speciality is to eclipse. Dora Fane and Mrs. Dering are both, critically speaking, as good-looking as she is; yet neither of them has a chance beside her. Something rather in her manner than in her face, I think?"

Steven smoked on in silence at one of his host's admirable regalias. He had not philosophy enough to enter upon a discussion of Katharine's charms with Katharine's lover.

"And Mr. Whyte—Mr. Clarendon Whyte—was there too, of course. Can the rose be without its attendant thorn? You get on with him, I hope, Lawrence? Any man who

is to be much in Hertford Street must get on with Mr. Clarendon Whyte, just at present."

"I don't suppose I shall be much in Hertford Street," said Steven. "I am going down to my farm to-morrow, and shall have plenty to keep me there. One thing is certain—I don't get on, and never should, with Mr. Whyte. These high-falutin, contumacious kind of gentlemen," he added, with kindling eyes, "are no company for me."

It was the first un-English expression Steven had made use of, and Lord Petres was pleased with it to such an extent that he almost laughed. "You are right, you are quite right," said he. "The fellow is an impostor; Brummagem muscularity, Cockney affectation of roué-ism—worst kind of all imposture—and you would never have anything to say to each other in a dozen years. Put him on shooting or tiger-hunting some day before an audience, and see what you make of him. I am told by persons who read such works," he continued, "that Mr. Whyte models himself on a style of young gentlemen much in vogue at present in novels, which confirms me in my distaste for that branch of literature. Still, women tolerate him. There is no denying it, Law-

rence, women do as a rule tolerate all impostors."

"Miss Dora Fane seemed to have a good deal to say to Mr. Whyte," answered Steven. "I don't believe either of the other ladies said six words to him during the whole time he was there."

"Katharine would not, certainly. Katharine has opinions above those of her sex in most things. Now Mrs. Dering—you did not see General Dering, I suppose, Lawrence? No, I should not think you ever would. You will be admitted to the set of Mrs. Dering's friends who never see General Dering, and a great mercy for you. Nothing so painful in a house like that—I speak from knowledge—as to be on the heavy list, and forced to assist at the heavy sacrifices which the poor old General calls dinner-parties."

Steven was silent. There was profanity to him in the lightness with which Lord Petres canvassed the merits and demerits of Katharine's relations.

"Mrs. Dering is a clever woman," went on Lord Petres, watching his face. "A woman the world speaks well of, and a very excellent chaperon for the Miss Fanes. You and I may be perfectly frank in speaking of all this, Lawrence. I, as you know, am

going to marry Katharine; you, as I surmise, are in a position to be congratulated with respect to Dora, and—”

“I congratulated about Dora Fane!” cried Steven, his face a-fire. “I think not, Lord Petres. Whoever told you so was mistaken. I know nothing more unlikely than Miss Dora Fane becoming my wife.”

“Well, then, I congratulate you still more,” said Lord Petres, pleasantly. “Will you hand me over the tobacco? Thanks. Marriage is a great mystery, Lawrence,” preparing a delicate cigarette as he spoke, “and, unless a man be specially gifted, he is wise not to attempt its solution. What can a single life do towards throwing light upon a problem which has vexed every political economist from the time of Moses—to go back no farther—till our own?”

“All I want to have light thrown upon is my own life,” said Steven. “I know nothing of problems or political economy, but—”

“You believe enforced companionship with one human creature until you die would promote your happiness? Ah, I think I believed that once—very long ago. All men have believed it, I suppose, at some stage, more or less crude, of their experience.”

"I can't imagine a man marrying who does not believe it," said Steven, warmly. "I can't understand a man engaging himself to marry any woman unless he believed that it would add to his happiness to possess her."

Lord Petres sent down a cloud of smoke with grave thoughtfulness through his nostrils. "What is happiness, Lawrence? What, for the matter of that, is possession? How much of a woman can a man call his? Does she belong most to the husband, whom she sees for three hours out of the twenty-four, or to the world for whom she dresses, drives, dances, and of which she dreams during the remainder? Now I am not a sentimental or a jealous man myself. Nothing would content me better in marriage than to be allowed to retain the precise habits of my present life, and for my wife to retain hers; but even my very modest scheme of happiness will, I feel, be shattered by my change of condition. I don't complain. I am going to marry. I simply accept as a fact—a fact in conformity, doubtless, with some larger law beyond my comprehension—that Duclos will leave me. I have argued; I have written, indeed, a sort of *brochure* for him, comprehending all that could be urged on both sides of the



question ; have twice augmented his income ; but all in vain. Duclos leaves me. He has no objection, he tells me, to my future wife ; not a word to say against my marriage, as a marriage. But it is a fixed principle of his life only to preside over bachelor establishments, and to this fixed principle I am to be brutally sacrificed."

"And are there no other French cooks to be had?" cried Steven. "Couldn't some artist be found with Monsieur Duclos' talents, but without Monsieur Duclos' prejudices?"

"Lawrence," said Petres, with something like a shade of colour coming into his white face, "this is a subject which you must allow me to say I feel too strongly about to discuss at the present moment. During the period of digestion Bright has expressly forbidden me to distress myself with any painful or complicated trains of thought. I was wrong to introduce Duclos' name at all. Speak about it to Katharine, who is in robust health and able to contend with disagreeable subjects, and she will tell you the whole story of how our marriage came to be put off. Are you going to Hertford Street this afternoon?"

"I? No ; I suppose not," said Steven,

rising, and looking through the window. "What excuse should I have for calling again so soon?"

"My dear sir, the last thing a woman ever needs excuses for is a man's attention to herself! If you wanted an excuse, which you don't, nothing would be easier than for you to leave a bouquet or bouquets for them as they are going to the opera to-night."

"I shouldn't think Miss Fane would be likely to accept flowers sent her by me," said Steven, stiffly, but with thoroughly sincere humility. "When she was a little child, and I a lad on my uncle's farm, I used to give her and Miss Dora bunches of flowers when I met them in the lanes. But amongst children there is no disparity of class, you know."

"I know that whatever Katharine Fane was at ten, you will find her at twenty-one," answered Lord Petres; "not a single vulgar or little feeling has place in Katharine's heart, more than can be said perhaps of her sister and cousin. A duke or a plain country squire is just the same to Katharine Fane, so long as he pleases her personally. Her fault, if fault you call it, is rather coquetry, Lawrence."

A knife seemed to enter, sudden and cold,

into Steven's heart. Love has intuitions, like those of genius. Some sharpening of his faculties seemed to lay bare before the yeoman in one moment all Miss Fane's past and future life; and he knew that he was jealous of it all! "Coquetry!" he repeated, half aloud; "I should not have thought a fault like that would be charged to Katharine Fane!"

"Well, I do not consider it a fault," said Lord Petres. "The mission of all women, I take it, is to please, and the woman is most womanly who pleases best. This, of course, is looking at the subject from a one-sided point of view. When you admire a hawk, you admire it for the qualities of its kind, not taking into account the sufferings of the sparrows. Katharine Fane flirts as the men of her race have been noted for fighting, neither expecting quarter, nor giving it. She knows nothing at all of love or sentiment, except in theory, but can act them both far more prettily than life; and in a handsome woman, Lawrence, nothing compels men's admiration so certainly as a notorious incapacity for love on her side. Every man thinks he will be an exception to the general rule."

Lord Petres spoke in his usual impassive

voice, but with the faint little curl generally to be noticed round his lips when the subject of love was under consideration. Steven Lawrence's heart fired. "Isn't it going too far to speak of 'incapacity,' Lord Petres? Can a woman be a woman, yet incapable of love? May not what you call her incapacity be, in fact, that she has never met with a man who so loved her as to compel her to give him back her love in payment?"


"I have not much opinion of that doctrine of reciprocity," said Lord Petres, shaking his head, and speaking in just the same kind of tone in which he would have discussed some doubtful combination in sauces or stuffings. "Devotion and blind faith and exalted passion are very nice things, in themselves, but when they are laid before women of the world, generally end in being trodden under foot by the person to whom they are offered."

"Then the less I have to do with women of the world, and the more I keep to my farm, the better for me!" said Steven, with spirit. "I have no desire to lay down my heart for the fairest woman that ever lived to tread upon."

"If you do so, remember that I warned you," said Lord Petres, as Steven held out

his hand to him. "Remember, also, that it is a great deal better to be made miserable, temporarily, by a woman who won't marry one, than eternally by a woman who will! Really, Lawrence, levity apart, I'm very glad you have no serious thoughts at all about love or marriage. Dora Fane is a pretty little woman (for an entresol) and all that, but monstrous expensive in her tastes, and about as good a companion for a man as the gilt butterfly on that clock. See every kind of life you can, and avoid as much as possible falling into the slough of British meats and wines — wines especially. A delicate palate like yours is not a gift to trifle with, and once vitiated, can never be recovered. There are not six unprofessional men in London who could have discriminated between the different vintages of Chambertin as you did. Above all, Lawrence, keep yourself free from entanglements. In your present frame of mind, a woman who didn't love you enough, or a woman who loved you too much, might just upset the whole remainder of your life for you."

"A woman who loved you too much." Do not call Steven a fool when I tell you that out of this commonplace remark of Lord Petres' his heart built up a presentiment of



good that made him happy during the next four hours at least! Most great and desperate passions start with childish faith in omens, with childish and insensate hopes. Just as plainly as Lord Petres had shown it to him did Steven know that he was not, and never could be, aught, save a moment's pastime, to Katharine Fane. That she was a coquette; that his love, did he offer it, would be trodden by her under foot—according to the custom of all women of the world—he never thought of questioning. And yet he hoped! if those first vague brooding dreams of passion can be called hope. He was quite humble; had no suspicion of double motive in anything Lord Petres had said to him; knew that he was a thorough unqualified simpleton, and was happy—perhaps during his whole life never was so happy again as on this day. That the excellent food, the wines, the tobacco, of Lord Petres had had some influence on his mental state, is more than likely . . . but I shrink from these humiliating analyses. The May sun shone piercing clear; the east wind to Steven's healthy nerves seemed to blow with pleasant springtide freshness; and everything about the London streets looked gilded in his sight.

He walked, chance guided, when he left St. James's Street, far away east, and thought how all the noise and movement of this city life cheered a man's heart; how it called aloud to him to work, and told him what wealth, what power was to be won by the constant will and by the strong right arm! Under ordinary circumstances a stranger, poor and alone, could scarcely listen to that city roar, I think, without remembering something of the human misery—the dead hopes, the living defeat—which is its daily burthen. But Steven was in a kind of rapture, and not a note from the great minor chord of pain and poverty and fruitless toil reached his ear. When he reached St. Paul's he turned, and with the afternoon sun shining on his face, walked leisurely back as far as Piccadilly, then through the Park to Kensington Gardens, where the great world had begun to assemble to listen to the band. How fair the women looked under the flowering chesnuts; how their delicate silks glistened in the sun; how rose and white the English faces showed in the level light! Everything Steven looked at seemed endowed with some bright and personal significance to himself to-day. All this outward glitter of wealth and pleasure—these equipages,

horses, fair women—instead of crushing him as it ought to have done with a fatal sense of his own insignificance appeared to him rather as a sort of show or gala got up to celebrate his return to England and the happiness that he had found there. London was great, truly, and he small ; rich, and he poor. But he was to meet Katharine to-night ! Out of all this crowd could there be six other men, he wondered, as happy as himself ?

As he stood, unnoticed by every one, listening to the band, his thoughts, unbidden, travelled back over the last ten years : over his fever of gold-seeking, his wanderings with Klaus in the wilderness, the simple ambitions and defeats of his hunter's life ; and, with a sudden emotion, half shame, half pity for himself, Steven knew that he had been a savage till yesterday. A savage till yesterday ; and he was to meet Katharine Fane, by her own bidding, to-night ! Sometimes when he and Klaus were “yarning” by the camp-fire at night, they had been wont to speculate what a man's sensations would be, who, with tastes, with wants like theirs, should abruptly be told that he had come into ten thousand a-year. Steven was realising a more intense, a more poignant alter-



nation of fortune now ; he had risen in a day from existence to life, from the sober plain of every-day contentment to the torrid heights, the restless intoxication, of passion. Was he to profit by the exchange as men usually do profit, who in maturity barter the poverty they know for riches of whose use they are ignorant ? This was a question for the future.

Towards five o'clock he crossed the Park again, and made his way to Covent Garden, where he spent a sovereign on a bunch of flowers for Miss Fane : tuberoses, lilies of the valley, white rose-buds, stephanotis ; flowers that his instinct told him Katharine would have chosen had she been at his side. These he carried himself to Hertford Street, and left for her.

"For Miss Fane, sir ?" asked the servant.

"For Miss Fane," said Steven, turning quickly away. And so the twenty-shilling bouquet was taken up-stairs at once and given over into Dora's small hands.

They were hands to hold fast everything that came, whether by mistake or of intention, into their grasp.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MEA CULPA.

MRS. DERING was a clever woman, Lord Petres had said—a woman the world spoke well of, and an excellent chaperon for the Miss Fanes. And testing cleverness, excellence, and the world's good opinion by a certain not too-exalted standard, Lord Petres was right.

At nineteen years of age, with only her youth and her handsome person for her dower, Arabella Fane, of her own free will, had promised to love, honour, and obey a man as thoroughly distasteful to her as any human creature with money could be, and nearly thrice her age, but who possessed a comfortable income (settled on her after his death) of three thousand a year; and from her wedding-day until now had acquitted herself in her position as the young wife of an old man with entire credit. She had four children, whom she did not neglect; she

looked well after her husband's household ; dressed better and spent less on her dress than most women ; went regularly to church and the court balls ; received a great deal of attention, yet never occasioned any scandal ; gave subscriptions with an ungrudging spirit to such metropolitan charities as published printed reports ; and had already secured for her sister Katharine one of the best matrimonial prizes in London. When the General or the children were ill, she was a sedulous nurse ; when a relation died, she wore mourning for a week longer than the milliner told her was necessary ; when any of her dear friends forfeited their position she cut them, if three or four of her best acquaintances had decided to do the same—if not, she really felt it was no place of hers to be the judge of her weaker brethren. An excellent wife, mother, and friend, Mrs. Dering, in addition to her high moral qualifications, had the reputation of being one of the pleasantest women in town to sit next at a dinner-party. She possessed real intelligence, with a little of Katharine's charm of manner when she talked ; could take interest enough for conversational purposes in politics, theology, hunting, art, and even literature ; and had always a stock of quiet, perfectly-safe

flirtation in reserve for men too stupid or too clever to be amused in any other way. Whether Mrs. Dering liked anything strongly was a question—that the human being nearest to her in the world, her sister, had not yet solved. She hated two things most thoroughly—the country and poverty; and had the good taste always to speak of both in accents of decency and respect. Next to these, I think—partly perhaps, as belonging to the country, partly to poverty—she disliked her cousin Dora; but invariably asked that poor little relation to spend the six best weeks of the season in her house, from which act of self-sacrifice alone you will see that Mrs. Dering was a woman of real principles.

“If Dora does not marry,” she was accustomed to say, “Dora, after my mother’s death, will have a right to look upon my house as her home.” And in saying this she was sincere. She would sooner have subjected herself to any personal annoyance than that the world should have occasion to say a near relation of Mrs. Dering’s was forced to work for her bread. But I don’t know that I would have cared to change places with the poor relation whose fortune it was to live on Mrs. Dering’s charity.

General Dering, happily alike for me and for the reader, spent the whole of his existence at the Senior United Service Club—a sacred retreat with which the plain history of Steven Lawrence can certainly have no concern. For thirty years of his life the old General had dined at seven: an hour which, as his wife and the Miss Fanes unanimously decreed, “broke in upon everything,” and had the additional disadvantage of being fixed. So throughout the whole of the past and present season—except on occasion of those heavy sacrifices called dinner-parties, of which Lord Petres had told Steven—General Dering, greatly to everybody’s relief, had adopted the practice of dining at his club, leaving Mrs. Dering and the girls free to celebrate high tea at any hour from five to nine that happened to suit their arrangements for the evening.

“High tea is so economical, my love,” Mrs. Dering had said, when first making covert advances to her husband on the subject; “so economical, and gives such infinitely less trouble in the house. I almost think we could do without Batters if we took to it for good; and then, you see, you will never be put out of your way. Of course, for the girls’ sake, I must go to these

operas and balls; but that is no reason why you should be made to suffer; and you know you are ill for a week, dear, always, if you dine half an hour earlier or later than usual."

Now, the reasons which made a movable high tea more economical than a fixed dinner are as inscrutable to me as the reasons for which the meal was called tea at all. There was never the most shadowy pretence at tea to be seen on the table—what fashionable ladies could keep up the strength their hard life demands on such mild fluid? and mayonnaises, cold game and poultry, and raised pies, are not, in the country at least, cheaper than hot dishes. That high tea, with three young and charming women, open windows, no servants, and no master of the house, was a much pleasanter meal than a hot dinner in a hot room, with a hot butler, and a hot old General eating audibly, was incontestable; and Mr. Clarendon Whyte, and all other bachelor frequenters of the house, were loud in praise of the change, and strenuous in advocating it among disaffected young wives and revolutionary daughters elsewhere.

For a good many years past the first care of poor Mr. Clarendon Whyte's soul had

been to dine gratuitously. He might prefer hot food to cold: this was a matter of detail. To make the principal meal of the day free of cost, must ever be a primary consideration in life to a gentleman who, on, say two hundred pounds a year, assumes the position of ten times that sum. And for every dinner to which he could, by possibility, have been invited under the old régime, Mr. Clarendon Whyte was invited now to at least five high teas. Always well dressed, always good-looking, always ready to be taken about to operas, balls, or concerts afterwards, Mr. Whyte, as Katharine used to say, was a very convenient honorary laquais de place of the establishment; and as he was thoroughly impartial in his attentions publicly to Mrs. Dering and the two Miss Fanes, the world had not as yet found much, matrimonial or scandalous, to say respecting the intimacy.

On this evening, when Steven was invited to meet them at Covent Garden, one of the accustomed high teas was to take place at half-past six; and at some minutes before six o'clock, Katharine Fane, already dressed as she was to be at the opera, came into the drawing-room, where Lord Petres was waiting for her. The effect of evening dress by

daylight is, in most cases, a discordant one. Your sense of fitness is disturbed by some bright colour, some garish jewellery out of keeping with the sober eyes of day, that they were never meant to meet. But Katharine Fane was a woman with whom dress was always subsidiary. At a breakfast-table or in a ball-room, in a riding-habit or a court train, it was invariably Katharine herself, not the colour or shape of what she wore, that held your eyes captive. A flowing soft-hued silk, white lace drapery veiling the noble lines of arm and throat, a piece of stephanotis in her brown hair, this was her toilette now. No earrings, no bracelet, no trinket of any kind about her; no tinge of colour on the face that nature had left so perfect in its delicate but healthy pallor.

She walked up with a smile of welcome to her lover's side, and he took her hand with the tips of his fingers, and carried it to his lips. Lord Petres had thoroughly decorous and French ideas on the subject of unmarried girls. "You are looking charming, Katharine. The way that you retain your looks in weather like this is really admirable."

"And you—how are you getting on to-day? I *am* so sorry about the east wind,"



said Katharine, with the prettiest air of concern imaginable. "Once this afternoon I hoped it had gone round, just an inch or two, to the south; but I'm afraid it has got back to the old quarter again this evening."

And she drew back a window-curtain with the hand that was disengaged, and looked out at the blue sky and cold sunshine which suited her own hardy temperament so well with a shake of the head full of mournful interest.

"The wind never leaves the east till August in this country," said Lord Petres, creeping with a shiver into an arm-chair close to the fire, upon which, in nice accordance with his tastes, two or three huge pieces of wood were blazing cheerily. "It shows very good feeling in you, Katharine, always to remember my sufferings—most persons, blessed with a constitution like yours, insult me by saying that the continuance of dry weather is healthy, or good for the wheat, or the poor; as if any statistics of that nature could interest a man with a digestion like mine—but I think, really, you have had enough of them for this season. I shall go to Paris to-morrow morning."

"Paris! not to stay there?" She came quickly to his side, rested one white hand

upon the arm of his chair, then turned away her face, and gave a little sigh. "Paris has more charms for you always than London, Lord Petres."

"Paris," said Lord Petres, solemnly, "has, with an equal amount of east wind, a warmer sun and less dust. On the south side of the Palais Royal, or under the chestnuts at the Luxembourg, an invalid at certain hours of the day may occasionally flatter himself into the belief that May is a summer month. Besides, Katharine—you know I am always frank with you—Duclos is Paris-sick. If I let him have three or four weeks of Mabile and the theatres now, he will, perhaps, be contented with England later on in the season. You understand?"

"I understand that Duclos is a tyrant," said Miss Fane; "for as to Paris being warmer than London, I don't believe a word of it. If M. Duclos wants a little Parisian dissipation, to Paris his master goes, no matter whether Katharine Fane is to be left alone in London or not."

"I shall not be gone a month, Kate, and you will have Dora's love affairs with the backwoodsman to settle in my absence."

Katharine coloured to her eyes; then bit her lip with vexation at the knowledge that

He is a very dangerous one, Kate. I am not afraid, only that it would rob you of a good friend, to take Steven Lawrence with me to Paris, if he went to-

morrow morning, might be his salvation. In another week it would be too late."

"Salvation ! a dangerous position !" cried Katharine, opening those serene brown eyes of hers wide. " Good gracious ! what is all this about ? What particular peril does Mr. Lawrence run in London ? He's old enough and big enough to look after himself, I'm sure." . " Did he bring you a bouquet this afternoon, Miss Fane ?"

" He—he, or some one, left a bouquet, I believe, but Dot has it. It was for Miss Fane. Of course that meant Dora, not me."

" And where did you get the orange blossom you have in your hair ? 'Tis beautifully dressed, Kate—would do credit to the best coiffeur in Europe. That natural crisp wave is what all the women in Paris have burnt their hair off their heads in trying to imitate."

" Orange blossom ! I do wish you would try to remember the names of plants. How often I have tried to make you learn them ! As if I should think of wearing orange blossom ! I got my poor little bit of *stephanotis* out of Dot's bouquet. It was made up entirely of white flowers, and Dot likes everything with so much colour ; so I took this bit of *stephanotis* from the centre, and cut

her one of Bella's pink camellias to put there instead."

"Ah! And what (the stephanotis being disposed of) is going to be done between you and Dora with Steven himself? You know me too well, Kate, to think that I would interfere with anything that affords you innocent amusement; but—regarding me altogether as an indifferent spectator—I wish you would tell me what is going to be done with Steven? I never read fiction or attend theatres, as you know——"

"Except the Lyceum once," interrupted Katharine.

"But if I can just be told the beginning and witness the end, these little love dramas of real life divert me amazingly."

"I really don't know what you mean by 'love dramas' and 'becoming' of Steven," said Miss Fane, with a great air of unconcern. "I told you—did I not? about some letters there had been between him and Dot. The most likely thing for him to 'become' is her husband, I should suppose."

"Afterwards?"

"Why, be happy for ever, like the people in stories," cried Katharine, "of course. I consider that Dora would be a prize for any man. It will be a great piece of good fortune for

your favourite, Lord Petres, if he marries her."

"My favourite or any other man who marries Dora Fane will require a good fortune," said Lord Petres, drily. "Kate, removed as you are so much above the prejudices of your sex in general, why do you retain this unholy hobby of seeking to promote the general unhappiness of the world through match-making? What good, what pleasure, will there be to yourself in forcing this unhappy young man into marrying your cousin Dora?"

"I force him, Lord Petres? What in the world do you mean? What influence can I have over Steven Lawrence or his decisions?"

"Every influence," was Lord Petres' placid answer. "Every influence, Katharine. How is it possible it should be otherwise? A man of a sanguine temperament like this backwoodsman is thrown, after living among wild beasts and savages for years, into the society of Katharine Fane, puts his heart—to speak, Kate, in the sentimental language that you like—at her feet, and then, Katharine Fane having been sufficiently amused by his torture, is to be kept quiet by a marriage with Miss Dora. Against the first part of the transaction I have nothing whatever to

urge; but against the marriage, if only on behalf of suffering humanity generally, I protest. As soon as I saw what a good fellow Lawrence was, I determined to speak to you about it. Don't marry him to Dora?"

"If Mr. Lawrence wishes to marry my cousin, I shall certainly not bias her, either for or against him," said Katharine, wisely passing over the first portion of Lord Petres' remarks. "You talk of my hobby for match-making. If all your hobbies were carried into effect there would neither be love nor marriage, nor anything else that is good and unselfish in the world, you must remember!"

Miss Fane brought out the shot with spirit, and her eyes kindled.

"Whatever you or I think, will have small effect on the increase or decrease of marriage generally," said Lord Petres, with perfect equanimity. "It is a matter governed more by the price of bread, they say, than by any considerations of a sentimental or moral character; so please don't be angry with me, Kate! Marry Steven Lawrence to Dora or to any one else, if it diverts you, but don't quarrel with me! I'm too weak to bear the effects of anger from you to-day." And Lord Petres lifted the beautiful white hand

tenderly, then held it, as well as its superior size would allow, within his own.

Katharine's whole manner changed in a moment, her eyes softened, a little well-pleased smile came round the corner of her lips. Notwithstanding all his small selfishness, all his sybarite effeminate eccentricity, Miss Fane, in a certain way, (and putting love wholly out of the question), was very much more attached to Lord Petres than the world in general, or perhaps than she herself really believed. She belonged to that rare class of women who are able, frankly and without vanity, to make themselves the friends and companions of men even while the accidents of youth and beauty make men their slaves. All Lord Petres' quaint philosophies and systems amused her, all the sterling worth of his steadfast little character appealed to her just as heartily as if she had been a man instead of a girl of one and twenty. And then, it must be remembered, he never made love to her; never was jealous, never paid attention to any other woman,—never, when they happened to be seen together publicly, was anything but charming in his devotion to herself! What could she feel but gratitude to so perfectly generous a lover? What resolve could she have but to



repay his absolute trust in her, however she might err in the letter, by the most absolute and loyal rectitude in the spirit ?

“I have something very particular that I want to tell you about, Lord Petres. You won’t be angry with me—promise me you won’t ? when you hear how it happened ; something about this Steven Lawrence, and no fault of mine, as you will see.”

Whatever mischief poor Katharine’s insatiate thirst for conquest had led her into since her engagement, she had always repeated the whole sum of her offending, without concealment or extenuation, to Lord Petres. There could be no very black guilt on her part, she would say to her conscience, so long as she was not ashamed to lay bare the state of her soul before him, her legitimate confessor ; and as her conquests, and her repentances, on an average, could be reckoned at about two a week, the sound of *meâ culpâ* had already a somewhat familiar ring in Lord Petres’ ears.

“I have wanted very much to tell you—please don’t go to sleep ! I shall be so unhappy if you don’t forgive me—but Dot, as usual, made one of her ridiculous mistakes—sent my photograph to this young man—Lord Petres, if you look like that again I

shall be silent—instead of her own. Now, could I help it?”

“You could not, Katharine.”

“Didn’t I do everything I could for them both? stopped away from the Atcherleys, where I was to have met *you*, to chaperon them—everything? Well, when he came—when this Mr. Lawrence came, Dot happened to have left the room, and so I . . . Lord Petres, I don’t think it kind of you to laugh . . . I had to receive him alone. You understand?”

“Perfectly.”

“And when he was shown in, of course I went forward to meet him, and—how I do hate having to tell such ridiculous stories—he mistook me for Dot!”

Lord Petres was silent.

“Do you understand me, or are you asleep?” said Katharine, petulantly; “or do you want me to repeat the charming little anecdote again? I had to receive Mr. Lawrence, your favourite, alone, and—for I choose to tell you everything, sir, whether it is to my credit or not—and he,” dividing each word syllabically, “mis-took me for Dot.”

“Mis-took you for Dot,” repeated Lord Petres. “Then all I’ve got to say is, it

must have been very disappointing for him when he found out his mistake."

Miss Fane drew away her hand, and moved from Lord Petres' side. After making a confession which costs one's pride dear, there are few circumstances more humiliating than to find our confessor very much less moved by our guilt than we ourselves.

"I wonder whether you care for anything, Lord Petres! I wonder whether anything I did, or left undone, *could*, for one instant, cause you an emotion of any kind!"

"Certainly, hearing that you had been mistaken for your cousin Dora, would not," answered Lord Petres. "Why will you insist upon wanting impossibilities, Katharine? Violent emotions—supposing me capable of them—would kill me. Every physician I ever consulted has ordered me to keep my feelings at a nice point of equilibrium, and fortunately, on the present occasion, they are divided with such geometrical accuracy that they precisely counterbalance each other. I'm sorry for Lawrence, because, as I told you just now, I like the fellow, and I foresee grief in store for him, and I am glad for Miss Fane, because I foresee a new amusement in store for her—"

"Amusement—for me? I amused by

Mr. Lawrence, after what I have told you ?”

“Amused by torturing him first, and marrying him to Dot afterwards? certainly, Katharine. Don’t be angry again. You can’t help it, I know. The whole thing is a matter of course. Are spiders responsible for the imbecilities of the flies who choose to get entangled in their beautiful glistening webs? Men have the lower animals on which to gratify the instincts of their nature for destruction. Women, in obedience to the stupid customs of civilization, are forced to seek their quarry among their own species. If you had foxes to run down or pheasants to shoot, Katharine, you would not be as cruel to your kind as you are, depend upon it.”

“Cruel!” exclaimed Katharine, almost with tears in her eyes. “Well, I did not think such an accusation as that would ever have been brought against me. The feeling I have for Steven Lawrence is one of pure, simple kindness, and for Dot’s sake—yes, and for his own too, I mean, whatever you may think, Lord Petres—to do the poor fellow any good turn that lies in my power.”

“Oh, that is quite a different affair!” said Lord Petres, gravely; “I was unjust to you,

Kate. You say you mean to do the poor fellow any good turn that lies in your power. I will tell you how to carry that intention out at once. Stay away from the theatre to-night, say 'Not at home' when he calls to-morrow, and for ever afterwards. The cure will be certain. Lawrence is not a man to force himself where he has once met with a rebuff."

Katharine Fane hesitated. "I should hate even to *seem* to be unkind to a man placed as he is, Lord Petres. I can't help liking poor Steven Lawrence, in spite—in spite of his presumption; and his farm, as you know, is not two miles from the Dene. Would anything be more disagreeable than to meet him constantly in the country, as I must do, after behaving coldly to him now? Besides," she added, lightly, "all this you say about Mr. Lawrence's danger is really an affair of your own imagination. Do stout healthy men in real life break their hearts because they have been sentimental for three weeks over awrong photograph? I wished to tell you the truth, of course, and now I shall never think of it at all again, except I mean as far as Dot is concerned, nor, I should say, would Steven Lawrence."

"Amuse yourself well, Katharine," said

Lord Petres, taking out his watch and rising ;  
“ I am sorry to spend such a short time with you, but I have to see Bright before dinner about some new poison he wants me to take, and it is five and twenty minutes past six already. I shall write to you by the late post on Monday next, and if you have anything to say meanwhile write to me—the usual address. Now what am I especially to remember to do for you in Paris ?”

“ You are especially to remember to return soon,” said Katharine ; “ also, if you can, to write to me oftener than once a fortnight while you are away.”

“ And what about dress ? You know I never forget anything you commission me to do.”

“ Well, if you are sure it is not too much trouble, I should like you to tell me about bonnets. Do the very best-dressed people wear the Reine Margot or the Dubarry shape ? You know the difference between the two ?”

“ Perfectly.” Lord Petres understood women’s dress like a Frenchman. “ I will go in the Bois the day but one after my arrival with no other object than to elucidate the point. Anything else ?”

“ I should like to know if the skirts are

worn as long as ever, and also if they are *invariably* gored in thin materials. In silk and stuff there can be no question, of course, but—in spite of Descou—Bella and I feel the gravest doubts as regards ball-dresses.”

“I will ask the best authorities in Europe, Katharine, and let you know. Are ball dresses or other thin materials *invariably* gored? Anything more?”

“Think of me a little, Lord Petres!”

“Quite a needless injunction, Miss Fane! Paris, with all the good that can be said for it, is the one city on earth where a beautiful Englishwoman runs least risk of being forgotten. I shall see no face like Katharine Fane’s till I return.”

This was how they parted; as they had parted any time during the last twelve months of their engagement. A well-acted reproach or two, a commission about the shape of bonnets and skirts from Katharine, a gracefully-turned compliment, a kiss on the white hand from Lord Petres. Was life to be taken up for ever in acting pretty little pictures of manners like these? thought Miss Fane, when she was alone; partings in which the lady droops her head and the gentleman kisses the tips of her fingers just as the figures do in a marionette comedy; mock confessions

made with a picturesque expression of repentance, to set a mock conscience at rest ; later on, a prettier picture than all, with a soft-eyed marble-hearted bride in white silk and Honiton lace, a high-bred bored little bridegroom, for the principal figures, a train of attendant bridesmaids in the background, a Protestant dean, perhaps, and a Catholic bishop to bestow their several blessings on the happy pair ; and then—then a wider scope of characters, with richer dresses and jewels to act them in, and Lord Petres, courteous, valetudinarian, indifferent ; an excellent bachelor acquaintance for two hours out of the twenty-four, and as far from her, Katharine Fane, as the frigid pole from the broad equator, to be her fellow-actor for the remainder of her days ? Was it possible that the fishermen's wives along the coast at home, with their few roods of sandy garden, their cottage full of sunburnt urchins, their simple human round of wifely cares, had a wholesomer, heartier hold on life than hers could ever be ? Why, even Dot—

And then the door opened, and Dot, shining like a stage fairy, in bright pink silk, and with gold dust in her short hair, and Steven's flowers in her hand, walked in.

“I waited patiently till Lord Petres had



departed, Kate. Bella met him as he was going out, and he tells her he is off to Paris to-morrow morning—not very lover-like, I think. Why, Katharine, there are tears in your eyes! Do you actually mean to say you care about bidding good-bye to Lord Petres for three weeks? or was it Mrs. Siddons or Rachel, who always used to shed real tears at the pathetic parts when she was acting?”

## CHAPTER X.

### TWO HOURS IN PARADISE.

THE first scene of the *Figlia* was nearly over when Steven reached Covent Garden. As the box-keeper opened the door for him to enter, Katharine Fane, who was seated at the back part of the box, turned round and met him with a smile that set his heart at rest at once. He had been torturing himself, as he drove to the theatre, with all manner of doubts as to the reception Miss Fane would give him now that she had had time to think over his misconduct of last night.

“You are later than I told you to be, Mr. Lawrence”—this she said as Steven took the vacant chair at her side—“but Patti does not come on till the second scene, so you have not lost much. What a crowded house! is it not? To-night is the first time Patti has appeared since her illness, and there is to be a new ballet after the opera.

Of course, you know who that is in the royal box? Bella"—and she leant forward and touched her sister's arm—"here is Mr. Lawrence."

Mrs. Dering turned, and bowed with just decent civility to Steven; Mr. Clarendon Whyte, who was at her side, lowered his eyelids about as much as he had done on their first introduction; Dora Fane stretched out her hand, and welcomed him with a whole roulade of little nods and smiles. "So good of you, Mr. Lawrence! such beautiful flowers!" holding up his bouquet to her lips. "How can I thank you enough for remembering me?"

"I—I must thank you for accepting them, Miss Fane!" said poor Steven. Had Dot been eighty, Steven's tender reverence for everything bearing a woman's shape would have kept him from telling her that he had never remembered her at all. "I was only afraid I took a liberty in sending them." And then he drew back, and with a feeling of perfectly childish disappointment glanced at the bouquet in Katharine Fane's hand—the accustomed bouquet of rare hot-house flowers that Lord Petres' florist had orders to send to Hertford Street every evening during the season.

"I was a little bit jealous about Dot's bouquet, I must confess," she cried, with her ready knack of answering looks rather than words. "These are very beautiful in their way, but I'm so passionately fond of all white flowers—stephanotis, most of all. I stole a piece, as you see," bending her neck so that he could better see the flower in her hair, "and made Dot replace it as she could. You must not be angry with me, you know."

"Angry!" said Steven, under his breath. Not another word; yet, when he had spoken, Katharine Fane felt that they had made a sudden, an enormous leap into intimacy; and steadily, though her cheek kept its colour, her pulse quickened.

"Here is Patti," she whispered, leaning forward to catch a first glimpse of the little figure that was tripping across the stage to Sulpizio's side, "and we must not speak another word. Now mind, Mr. Lawrence, I expect you to be in raptures. Ah, how pretty she is looking—you dear little creature! look at her through the glasses, and tell me if you ever saw such a beautiful face in your life."

Steven, as you may imagine, was supremely ignorant of the nature of opera-

glasses, and, after one or two ineffectual attempts at using them, declared, boldly, that he saw better with his own eyes. "Impossible!" said Katharine, "they are the best glasses I ever used. You cannot have the focus right. Let me set them for you—so. Now, isn't she beautiful? Such eyes, and such a mouth, and such goodness on all the dear little face!"

"She is handsome!" said Steven, as he returned the glasses to Miss Fane's hand, but without the slightest enthusiasm in his tone.

"Handsome! did you ever see any face more perfectly beautiful?"

"Yes, indeed I have, Miss Fane."

After which they were silent again; Katharine leaning back in her chair, and listening, with seemingly rapt attention to the music, and Steven drinking in by every sense the subtle delicious intoxication of her presence: the intoxication to which this fairy scene of light and brilliancy—the stage, the audience, the prima-donna's voice itself—were to him but adjuncts!

Neither then, nor afterwards, was Steven Lawrence anything but a very prosaic Kentish yeoman, as far as expression went: neither through words, marble or colour,

was thought or emotion of his destined, while he lived, to find artistic utterance. Yet, for this one evening, I say that a mysteriously-quickenèd soul passed into the commonplace "sheath of a man," and made him feel, for two hours or so, like a poet and an artist ! He followed the story of the opera with Katharine's help, and—simply carried away by stage virtues and stage passions, like a child—his heart fired at the image of Maria's love for Tonio; at her agony of grief when she parts from her humble soldier life, her outburst of honest nature when in the midst of her new-gotten wealth and station, she sees Sulpizio, and the dear old *rataplan ! rataplà !* burst, involuntarily as a bird's song, from her lips. Seven or eight months later, Steven happened to hear the *Figlia del Reggimento*, Mademoiselle Patti singing in it again, in Paris, and was just as alive as any other enlightened man would be to the stage tinsel of investing a camp-girl with all this love and faith and generosity of heart. To-night he was a child, a poet, a lover—a believer in everything fair and noble in human nature : even human nature on the boards of Covent Garden Theatre.

"You are as enthusiastic as I meant you to be," said Katharine, during one of the

choruses of the second act. "At first, you would scarcely allow that Patti was good looking, and now you know you are utterly carried away—ready to throw yourself at her feet!"

"I know that I am carried away," answered Steven, in his candid fashion; "carried away much farther than my wisdom bids me go, but I know also that I have no wish to throw myself at the feet of any woman living, save one, and she is not Mademoiselle Patti."

Now, from a man whom she regarded as an equal, Katharine Fane would have held this speech to be either a stupid impertinence or a still more stupid declaration; and, for very certain, would have met it with an answer admirably blent of mockery, indifference, and disdain. But after the charge Lord Petres had brought against her of cruelty she felt it was impossible for her to treat any presumption, any folly of this poor Steven's with undue severity, so did what was, in truth, more fatally cruel than the harshest rebuff she could have dealt him: blushed ever so little, and threw down her eyes, and then laughed—that gracious low laugh, that to Steven's mind was such far sweeter music than any in Donizetti's score.

"You are very faithful to your absent love, Mr. Lawrence; that is all I can say. There are few men who would not be led away from their allegiance, for an hour, at all events, by such a syren as Patti. Ah! when you have lived among us longer," and she sighed, "you will forget all these primitive virtues you have learnt beyond the seas. To be faithful to any one thing or person long, would be poor policy to us men or women of the world!" And she broke off one of the costliest flowers in her bouquet, and scattered it absently, petal by petal, on her dress as she spoke.

Her face, her attitude, her whole expression at this moment, was a picture destined never while he lived to fade from Steven's memory. He saw her at a hundred future times, when she looked every whit as fair as now—times when he loved her more passionately, perhaps—times when he hated, when he despised her; but never again did any image of her so sink in upon his heart as on this evening, when, as I have said, he felt for once in his life with an artist's feeling, and saw with an artist's eyes. The pure-cut blue-veined arm, showing bare from cloak or drapery against the crimson hangings of the box; the throat, white as fresh-hewn marble,



but instinct with warm life; the delicate line of profile; the parted lips; the careless hair;—every smallest detail in that bright picture, it was his misery (and his exceeding happiness) to retain within his memory, living, intact, as in this first moment when his senses—unconscious of all that they were storing for the future—received their register.

“Quite delightful to see your cousin looking so well pleased,” whispered Mr. Clarendon Whyte, with ironical emphasis, into Dot’s ear. “Of course I don’t presume to understand Miss Fane’s fastidious tastes, still I should not have thought that that—er—pwize-fighter sort of man would have been likely to find favour in her sight.”

“Pwize-fighter sort of man?” repeated Dot. Poor little Dot! she was in an excessively bad temper with Mr. Whyte, or she would never have ventured to mimic his peculiar charm of pronunciation. “I may be stupid, but I do not in the least see the point. Mr. Lawrence is one of the handsomest men I ever saw—so sunburnt and manly-looking, and excellent features as well. Mr. Lawrence, I hope you are not *very* much bored by all this music we are making you listen to?”

And Dot turned pointedly away from Mr. Clarendon Whyte, and, until Patti's entrance silenced the house again, continued to give Steven the prettiest smiles, the most coquettish glances and whispers, of which she was capable.

Dot exercising all her little Parisian charms upon the poor backwoodsman, and Katharine Fane friendly and gracious at his side! Had Steven been anything but the plain single-hearted fellow that he was, some degree of vanity could scarcely have failed to be called forth in him by such a position; and vanity once set in action would, no doubt, have gone far to save him. But unhappily for himself, the passion, the madness that already filled Steven Lawrence's breast, was too thoroughly genuine to admit of any smaller feeling having place there. A man whose ambition is seriously set on grasping a crown, is not likely to be turned aside by any paltry or personal temptations that beset him on the road.


When the sorrows of the charming little Figlia were just attaining the climax which dramatic art requires the sorrows of all heroines to attain ten minutes before the curtain falls upon their final happiness—Steven at the summit of his Fools' Paradise

—the door of the box opened, and a man's figure glided quietly into the chair, still unoccupied behind Katharine.

"Captain Gordon!" she whispered, turning round to the new comer with a smile that made Steven's heart sink to zero. "Captain Gordon, exactly in time, of course, to be too late! Why have you not been to see me all this age? What has become of you? Have you been out of town, or only lazy, as usual; and did you know that I was to be here to-night?"

"I have been out of town, Miss Fane, and lazy also as usual; and I knew that you were to be here to-night. Is it likely I should have come unless I had known it? Petres has persuaded me to go to Paris with him to-morrow, and told me where you were to be found, so I just came in for two or three minutes to wish you good-bye.

Captain Gordon was a man somewhat under forty years of age, with a slow, melancholy way of speaking, a manner indolent almost to effeminacy; blonde hair and beard already thickly sprinkled with white, and a face that, without being handsome, had something beautiful in the excessive serenity and goodness of its expression. "Une véritable tête de Jésus," poor Gavarni said of George



Gordon when he saw him once from the window of his sick-room in Paris.

"Just the sort of man to please these women of the world," thought Steven, taking a thoroughly unfavourable and thoroughly unjust measurement of him in one cold look. "A smooth-tongued, fair-skinned old dandy, with the pretty manners of a girl, and all the graces his London tailor can put upon him. What chance should a rough-handed, sun-burnt savage like me have among them all?"

And he turned away, trying his utmost to look interested in the fate of the lovers on the stage, and indifferent to everything else; but hearing with preternatural accuracy every word of the friendly farewells, and little commissions for Paris, and commands to be back very soon, and bring Lord Petres back too, that it was Miss Fane's pleasure to whisper into the "old dandy's" ear during the five or six minutes that he remained in the box.

Had Steven known a little better what manner of man that old dandy was, I think, even with all his newly-awakened faculties for self-torture, he would have found it hard to be jealous of Katharine Fane's friendship for him. Katharine, who had never a word to say to carpet-knights of the order of Mr. Clarendon Whyte, was weak exceedingly in

her devotion to all genuine hardihood or personal bravery in men. Her veneration for the highest intellect in Europe was second—could you have got her to confess the absolute truth—to what she felt for Garibaldi or for Stonewall Jackson; and, of all the men she had ever personally known, George Gordon seemed in her eyes the bravest. “Other men go into battles,” she would say, “because secondary motives call them there. It is their profession only, or their duty.” (This is Katharine’s morality, not mine.) “George Gordon seeks danger because he likes danger. No man would go about on battle-fields as he does, helping the wounded on both sides, with only a silk umbrella over his head, unless he had a lion’s heart—and I love him for it!” And George Gordon, quite aware of the state of her affections, had long ago, in Lord Petres’ presence, pledged himself seriously to return them in the event of his friend’s death before his own.

His love of running about on battle-fields had more than once cost the “old dandy” dear. At Solferino, the weather being hot, he managed to hire a calèche, in which he leisurely drove himself about just outside the French lines, and falling into the hands of the Austrians was on the point of being

shot as a spy, when an officer who had known him in Vienna declared him to be English, and a lunatic, and so saved his life. In the Danish war, he and a friend of the same tastes, went regularly through the campaign; and at Dybbøl, while indifferently succouring wounded Danes and Prussians alike, George Gordon got hit by a spent ball in the leg and lamed for life. During the four visits that he paid to America during the war, his hair-breadth escapes by land and sea would have made a much thicker volume than that of many professional heroes, could he have been induced to write them. It was impossible for any one who really knew the man to accuse George Gordon of affectation or self-glory in his amateur pursuit of danger. Except to the three or four men with whom he was on terms of intimacy, he never spoke of what he had been doing at all; his own brother first knew of his being in the thick of the Danish fighting through seeing his conduct at Dybbøl mentioned in the correspondent's letter of the *Times*. When he was a youngster, his father, an Ayrshire country gentleman, bought him a commission in the Guards; and by five-and-twenty George Gordon had drunk to the dregs of the cup of ordinary London ball-room dissipation, and

grown sick of it. So he exchanged into a line regiment, then starting for the Crimea; fought steadily through the whole of the Russian war, and at the conclusion of the peace (forced upon us by the French, he always said), sent in his papers in disgust, and left the service. From that time till the present, his life had been spent in dawdling about the West End during the season—yachting or shooting a little in autumn—and, as Katharine said, “helping the wounded on battle-fields, with a silk umbrella over his head,” whenever any fighting happened to be going on about the world. Ball-going young ladies called him cynical, because he was indifferent to balls and to their society; but ball-going young ladies, for once, were faulty in their deductions. See George Gordon with children—see the abject slavery to which any human being from the age of two to ten could at once reduce him—and say whether it was possible such a man could be a cynic! He belonged simply, as far as social ethics went, to the broad school of middle-aged Bond Street philosophers (I fear not a decreasing school), who, in their gilded youth, have learnt to regard young ladies as a species of animated doll—expensive in its tastes, unprofitable as a companion—and who, after

five or six and thirty, think scarcely more about them than men of twenty think of tops and marbles.

With Katharine Fane alone, out of all the young women of his acquaintance—Katharine, who, through some strange inconsistency of nature, was full of soft feminine grace, yet not frivolous; beautiful, yet alive to a great many interests in human life besides her beauty and her dress—would George Gordon, of his own free will, spend more than a quarter of an hour at a time: and with her he was the most charming, the most constant of friends. People of the world, with the world's accustomed gross disbelief in such friendships, had for a long time insisted that Captain Gordon must be one of Miss Fane's rejected suitors, but that the girl was too subtle—think of Lord Petres' wretched health, and his acknowledged distaste for marriage, and George Gordon an elder son!—to let him go. But as George Gordon was a man who, for very many years, had cared nothing for what was said of him, and as Lord Petres not only continued to live, but to show every sign of fidelity to Miss Fane, the intimacy had just gone on until the world had ceased even to fear that no good would come of it.



To say that Katharine Fane was not secretly flattered by the chivalrous devotion George Gordon gave to her, and to her only ; to say that no little feminine intentional art of hers ever reminded him that he was only a man—left unscathed on sufferance—and she a young and beautiful woman, who might be victor if she chose, would be to say that Katharine was not Katharine. In her friendships, honest and large-hearted though she was, Katharine Fane could no more help wishing to be a little more than liked than the great queen could help wishing her courtiers to bow to the soft hand of Elizabeth Tudor the woman, rather than to the wisdom and majesty of Elizabeth the Princess. What wonder that Steven, too ignorant to discriminate between the finer shades of friendship, flirtation, and love-making, should feel his heart grow sick as he watched them together ? Those pleasant laughs, those low whispers, those full soft glances ; every trick of manner that in his folly he had considered as something belonging to himself alone ; were accorded just as freely, he saw, to this man with the faded dandy face as they had been to him ; as freely as they would be accorded to Lord Petres ; to the next man she spoke to ; to everybody weak enough to be led

astray by them. And five minutes ago he had been ready to tell her that he worshipped her ; to throw himself on her pity ! *Her* pity ! The tender mercy of a woman of the world like this !

As Captain Gordon left the box, and while Steven was getting all the wisdom he could out of his own reflections, and remembering Klaus's story and Lord Petres' warning, and everything else most disagreeable to remember, the curtain slowly fell on the Figlia, and Tonio, and the old sergeant, and the grand Marchesa, all holding each other's hands, and stepping backwards, and bowing and smiling, as happy newly-reconciled relations do—on the stage. And with grim satisfaction Steven realised to himself what a ridiculous gew-gaw piece of trumpery an opera was. These gesticulating foreign men and women singing out their loves and sorrows to the other men and women—actors equally with themselves—who sat round in their boxes and listened. The curtain down, the prima-donna was recalled; twice—three times ; and then began one of the usual Patti scenes. Men in the stalls clapping as if they were frenzied ; women standing up in the boxes and throwing their bouquets on the stage, on the orchestra—anywhere ; Mrs. Dering,

and the Miss Fanes, even Mr. Clarendon Whyte, sharing in the general excitement.

“Applaud, Mr. Lawrence, applaud!” cried Katharine. “How can you be so cold? The first time she has appeared since her illness—and look! ah, do look how the princes are clapping!”

But Steven was not in a humour to clap his hands together because he was bid; and even the example of princes failed to arouse him into enthusiasm.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TRANSFORMATION SCENES.

“JEALOUS!” thought Katharine, glancing round, when the house had grown quiet again, at Steven’s moody face—“jealous, and not a perfect temper—ah! you poor, big Steven, what a life is before you! How good it would be for once to see Lord Petres look like that! Can a man care much for one, I wonder, without being made miserable sometimes? Could Lord Petres be made miserable by anything except east wind and the doctors? Mr. Lawrence,” very softly.

No answer.

“Mr. Lawrence?” rather louder.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Fane.”

“How did you enjoy that last scene of the opera?”

“Excessively, of course.”

“You did not,” thought Katharine, “and

you shall tell me so before long. Ah, you are a convert at last, then. You confess that the little Figlia is perfectly charming?"

"She is a perfectly good actress," answered Steven, more morosely than any man had ever answered Katharine Fane before, "on or off the stage, *that* I am told, is the great secret of all women's charms."

"Mr. Lawrence, please don't be cynical," said Katharine, with thorough good-humour. "If you knew how pleasant it would be to me to meet with some one who would always give his own fresh opinions, not the worn-out opinions of the rest of this worn-out world!"

"You would not like such an one long, I guess," said Steven, bluntly. "No man who spoke the whole truth would be fit company for—for——"

"An artificial, silly fine lady like me," interrupted Katharine. "Very well, then, I have only one thing to ask of you—try. As long as we know each other—and I hope that will be a very long time—speak the truth to me, and see if I ever dislike it. Now, will you?"

"Is the compact to be a mutual one?" asked Steven, wondering as he spoke at his own audacity.

"Mutual! yes, to be sure, if it is in my power to make it so?" cried Katharine, with hearty readiness; "though it will be a more difficult part for me to play than for you, I suspect, Mr. Lawrence. However, I will do my best, and probably, like most other things, the habit of truth-telling can be acquired by practice. Now, do you, speaking under our new compact, think that the chief secret of a woman's charm is that she shall be unreal—a thorough actress, as you said just now?"

"I only repeated what I have been told, Miss Fane," said Steven. "I speak on the authority of a person much better informed in such matters than myself."

"Ah, I understand. Lord Petres has been inoculating you with some of his horrible French heresies. Give me your own opinion, please. I know those of Lord Petres—on all subjects—by heart."

"Miss Fane, the subject is above me altogether. I am a barbarian—in the darkest ignorance respecting everything, except perhaps bears and panthers."

"But you did thoroughly enjoy that bit of Patti's acting in the last scene?"

Steven was silent.

"Why won't you tell me, Mr. Lawrence?"

I really wish to hear your first frank impressions of everything."

"Well then, as you force me to speak," and Steven looked at her steadily, "I don't believe I heard a note of the music in that last scene at all—my enjoyment in it, and in everything else, was spoilt. Don't you know this just as well as I can tell it you?"

With a man as uncompromisingly sincere as Steven, the most refined coquette, the most finished woman of the world, would have found it hard to hold her ground with plain truth-telling once admitted between them. Katharine's eyes sank. "I was so sorry to find Captain Gordon was going out of town. I should have liked to introduce him to you. I am sure you would get on well together."

"I think not, Miss Fane, if Captain Gordon is the gentleman to whom you were talking just now. These fine London dandies are not at all in my way."

"Dandies! Oh, I like that! George Gordon is about as much a dandy as Lord Petres, and I hear that you and he have already become fast friends."

"Lord Petres was very kind to me to-day," said Steven, quickly. "I am not so ignorant as to think that a man of Lord

Petres' rank and fortune could ever be my friend."

All the native generosity of Katharine's heart—the one quality unspoiled in her by worldly contact—was stirred by his tone. "Difference in rank! What, have you really come back from America with the old-fashioned idea that English people do nothing, at this age of the world, but bow down before the golden calf of birth or station? Why, Lord Petres himself says that the hours of aristocratic principle are numbered. In another twenty years, if we go on as we are doing now, the only possible aristocracy will be that of labour. The rulers of the world will be its workmen."

"That is very well for Lord Petres, in his position, to say," answered Steven, quietly, "and very gracious of you, in your position, to repeat. But we live now, not twenty years hence, and I, for one, have not the slightest wish to alter facts as they stand. Lord Petres is a rich man and a gentleman; I am a small farmer, whose bread must be earned by the work of my own right hand. Lord Petres may patronize me. He could never make me his friend, nor should I wish it."



Until now every feeling of Katharine Fane's for Steven had been largely mixed with pity. She pitied him for his honesty; for the mistake that had brought him among them at all; for his prospect of becoming Dot's husband. More than all she pitied while she liked him better for his Quixotic hopeless adoration for herself. In this moment she first distinctly recognised that her new plaything was a man; and her heart went out to him.

"You are proud, Mr. Lawrence, and I like you better for being so. Some day, when you have got really to know us all, I think you will reckon Lord Petres and George Gordon—me, too, I hope—among your friends. George Gordon is one of my firmest allies. He is not, any more than Lord Petres, what is called a ladies' man, generally; but I am afraid I don't get on with ladies' men. All my greatest friends, until now, have been men of the age of Lord Petres—old men Dot and Bella call them—who have given up balls and young ladies' society a quarter of a century ago. Fine London dandies"—and she gave a glance at Mr. Clarendon Whyte—"are no more in my way than in yours. However we differ in some things, there at least is a

bond of sympathy between us from the commencement."

So she charmed his jealousy away : so, in spite of himself, she made him feel that he was to be regarded as one of her friends—a friend on a like footing, on a like equality, with the rest.

"We shall return home very soon now," she went on, as Steven remained silent; "to-morrow, if I can possibly induce Dot to go—I have had enough of London for this season—and then I hope you will get to know us better. We shall expect to see a great deal of you at the Dene."

"And you advise me to come there?" said Steven. "Remember that you have promised to tell me the plain truth in everything! You are good enough to call yourself my friend, and you advise me to come often to your house?"

"I do, indeed, Mr. Lawrence. I know that papa and my mother will be glad to see you, and Dora, too, of course, and—"

The curtain rose upon the first scene of the afterpiece; and Katharine—it was balm hereafter to her conscience to remember—left the sentence unfinished.

"Oh! isn't that lovely?" cried Dot, jumping up, or, rather, down, upon her feet.

A sensational tableau, in which stage dresses were to be seen at their best upon the ladies of the ballet, and under the glare of electric light, was the only portion of dramatic art that appealed with real force to Dot's sympathies. "Do you see Mademoiselle Fleuri, Kate? How well she looks in light hair! Mr. Whyte, is little Fleuri's hair her own, dyed, or false? I always wish so I could see these people close, to know how they make up!"

"Mademoiselle Fleuri's hair is as much her own as anything purchased at an extravagantly high price can be," said Mr. Whyte, with a feeble smile at his own reproduction of this oldest of all poor jokes. "It's the dearest colour in the world—only one shop in Paris supplies it—real blonde cendrée. I can ascertain for you the exact price of the whole coiffure, if you like."

"Price! Why, do you think I want to imitate persons of that kind?" cried Dot, indignantly. "I should have thought wearing my hair four inches long, as I do, would prevent people, at least, from suspecting me of anything false—which I detest. Oh, Katharine! look at the mauve and silver group!—made long, I declare, those would be exquisite ball-dresses—and the court

ladies, and the pages ! I could think myself in Paris again. This is the best thing I ever saw before in England."

The afterpiece was one of those mixed representations, half ballet, half *féerie*, wholly "sensation," which London managers have of late begun so liberally to import from Paris : a representation making no particular attempt at the imitation of nature, striving little after grace, nothing whatever after the awakening of any save "sensational" emotion in the minds of the spectators : an affair altogether of lime-lights and transformations, and scores of well-favoured young women lightly clad in tissue dresses, but which held a refined and educated audience in rapt attention from the moment the curtain rose until it fell. Miss Fane and Mrs. Dering were quite as genuine in their admiration of it all as Dot. "Is it not wonderfully got up?" said Katharine, turning to Steven, as Mademoiselle Fleuri, after a succession of "daring flights" and breathless pirouettes, was receiving the enthusiastic applause of the stalls and a shower of bouquets more liberal even than had been accorded to Patti. "Is not little Fleuri's dancing good, and the effect of the whole scene admirable?"

"I don't know whether the dancing is

called 'good'," answered Steven. "I believe I have seen the gipsy dancers throw their feet as high in the streets of Mexico. Of the general effect of the scene, I think I had better give no opinion."

"Yes, please do; I should like to hear how these theatrical effects strike people who are unused to them."

"Well, then, Miss Fane, I should say the effect—for what it aims at!—is perfect; but I am pained to see *you* here. It is not, to my mind, a fitting or a decorous scene for a woman to witness."

A blush of angry surprise coloured Katharine's face to the temples. "So much for giving wild Indians the liberty to express their savage instincts!" she thought. "I don't know what you mean, Mr. Lawrence, by 'not a fitting scene.' Would I, would my sister, would any of us be here, if it was not perfectly befitting? You forget yourself a little, I think."

"I remember I was ordered to speak the truth," said Steven, humbly, "and I see that I have offended you. But what is said is said. I spoke only what I meant."

Miss Fane looked away from him without answering a syllable—looked away with an expression of cold dignity which, three

minutes ago, Steven would have sworn that soft face was incapable of wearing; and so the ballet went on. More "daring flights," more fairies dressed in rose-bud wreaths and silver wings, more electric light, more golden showers. Steven sat it all out in silent misery. That he had, by his gross plain speaking, irrevocably offended Miss Fane, was certain; yet for his life he could not have brought himself to soften away, or apologise for that which he had said. Brought up as a boy in austere dissenting horror of theatres, cards, and dancing, Steven, when he found himself his own master at eighteen, had, as a matter of course, become a frequenter of every theatre and gambling-house which the Californian towns offered to him. His temperament (the old temperament of the Lawrences, *pur sang*) was essentially, and in spite of all hereditary or acquired beliefs, a pleasure-loving one; his capacity for resisting temptation of all kinds small; his eagerness for present enjoyment far stronger than his dread of future retribution. And still, no uncommon anomaly in characters like his, the prejudices of his early years had remained unshaken long after principle, as applied to his own life, had succumbed.

The old puritanical view of theatres being the outworks of the Evil One had never been stronger in his heart than at this moment. Mademoiselle Fleuri, and the attendant crowd of nymphs and fairies and pages, belonged he thought, to precisely the same class as the gipsy dancers of the Mexican streets ; and for eyes as honest as Katharine's to look calmly on at their evolutions was sacrilege ! He was too uneducated to know that refined people regard a ballet altogether from an æsthetic point of view ; too narrow-minded to remember that what was of the earth to him might, to more highly-cultivated eyes and consciences, be pure. He felt only—as one may imagine a solitary Mahomedan would feel on finding himself among European ladies in a ball-room—that he was assisting at a scene of gross unveiled indecorum, yet one in which he alone out of all the assembled company saw or imagined any evil.

Suddenly, just as the ballet was closing in a flood of rose-coloured light, Katharine turned to him again. “ Mr. Lawrence,” she said sweetly, “ forgive me for speaking as I did ! I have been trying during the last quarter of an hour to see things as you—fresh from the bears and panthers—must see them, and at last I have brought myself to

feel how natural it was that you should speak as you did. Now, I like a good ballet, and I don't, and never shall see the slightest harm in it; but then I don't know that I ever see harm in anything. You do. These little differences of opinion will give us the more to talk about. Will you put on my cloak for me?"

She rose, and Steven took a voluminous soft fabric of white cashmere, silk, and swansdown from the back of her chair, and began to turn it round and round—which-ever side he turned it finding that it grew more hopelessly unlike a cloak in his grasp. Katharine was accustomed to the attentions of men who knew as much about cashmere and swansdown as she did herself, and something in the yeoman's ignorance pleased her—I suppose by force of contrast.

"Let me help you out of all that labyrinth!" she whispered, looking up with a smile into his embarrassed face, as she took the cloak from him. "These tassels, you see, are supposed to represent a hood, made so that it cannot by possibility be drawn over any human head; now, if you would try *once* more?"

And then Steven, with reverential hands, having put the cloak round her shoulders, she took his arm, in spite of a look from



Mrs. Dering, and led the way out of the box.

The lobbies of the theatre were densely crowded that night. Dukes, earls, and commoners—half London—had followed in the wake of royalty to see Mademoiselle Fleuri in the new ballet; and before a minute had passed, Steven and Katharine found themselves cut off from the rest of the party.

"I see some one has picked up Dora," said Katharine, looking back across her shoulder, "and Bella is with Mr. Whyte, so we are all right. I never feel easy about Dora in a crowd, until a pretty strong arm protects her; the poor little Dot might so easily be knocked down and trodden to pieces. Please forgive me, Mr Lawrence!" This as a great wave of people from the upper staircase made her cling closer to Steven's arm. "I wonder whether you will ever forget the *peine forte et dure* you have been put through this evening?"

"I shall remember none of the foreign languages they sang in," answered Steven, upon whom, as you have seen, French quotations were lost. "I shall remember being with you, and your toleration of my stupidity always. To-night has been to me like the beginning of a new life, Miss Fane."

A good many of Katharine's friends came

across her on her way out, and all of them—I speak of her female friends—looked, with more attention than London people usually bestow on unknown men, at Steven's handsome face, towering a good head and shoulders above the common crowd. It had not hitherto been Katharine's fate to be brought into contact with men of whose natural or physical endowments she could feel proud. Her father, whom she could just remember, was small and delicate; her step-father, Mr. Hilliard, measured about five feet five in his shooting boots; Lord Petres was half a head shorter than herself; and it was with a feeling of weakness, of dependence, absolutely new to her experience that she clung to Steven's stout arm, and let him pilot and support her through the crowd. The existence of those qualities by which Steven Lawrence had been known among his rough mates in the American woods, his hardihood, his strength, his nerve, seemed revealed to the girl, as if by instinct, in this moment, when the only difficulties the poor fellow had to overcome were the clinging laces and training draperies of an avalanche of fine ladies! and all the men whom she had known hitherto were dwarfed, as she mentally placed them at Steven's side.

"Dot will have a strong arm to uphold her," she thought; "yes, and a warm heart to love her, when . . . when all this present folly is past, and I am forgotten!" and she sighed.

Steven turned, and saw that she was looking tired and pale. "Miss Fane, you are ill," he whispered tenderly; "let me make a road for you; I can, in an instant, if you wish it, and get you into the air? you look faint."

But Katharine laughed, and declared herself strong enough to bear another hour, if there was need, of her position. "If you knew what we have to go through in London parties," she said, "you would not accuse me of fainting in a crowd like this. I have stood more cruelly trampled upon and crushed than we are now, on a staircase for two hours together at an 'at home,' and called it pleasure afterwards. Ah, mystephanotis!" they had reached the outer vestibule, and were within a yard or two of their own party again, "my poor little bit of stephanotis is falling, and I can't even raise a hand to save it!"

And as she spoke her flower, the only one out of Steven's bouquet that had reached

her, fell, to be trodden, of course, into atoms by the crowd.

“The best place for it!” said Steven, with a sudden, bitter recollection of all Lord Petres had said to him,—“the best place for it;” but there was a kind of question in his voice. “The gift reminds the giver of his place!”

Katharine Fane was silent.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DOT'S BEAU-IDEAL.

“**I** THINK if you do marry him that you will be very fortunate, Dot. I think any woman would be fortunate who married Steven Lawrence. Whatever his short-comings in birth or fortune, or outward polish, he is a man. You would never have to blush for him !”

“C'est selon,” answered Dot, sharply. “In his place, among ploughed fields and turnips, I am quite ready to allow Steven Lawrence may have his merits. In a drawing-room I should blush for him every ten minutes; if, that is to say, which is very unlikely, I ever became Mr. Steven Lawrence's wife.”

The rouge and the gold-dust were gone; the baby-curls pinned tightly back from the temples; the pink silk was replaced by a plain cambric wrapper; and the little shining fairy of the opera had turned into a very old

fairly indeed, as she stood before the fire in Katharine's room, talking into the small hours, as her custom was, over the events of the day. Katharine looked at her with a profound feeling of pity as she spoke. To a girl in the flush of her youth and beauty no sight is more pathetic than that of an unmarried woman eight or ten years older than herself—eight or ten years, all the fair summer that lies so full of promise before *her*, wasted! and the great prize, the prize which is to make up for lost youth and beauty, for vanished conquests, and slaves that are slaves no longer, unattained.

“If you despise Steven Lawrence and his suit now, you may repent it some day, Dora. Balls and operas, and gentlemen like Mr. Clarendon Whyte, are very well for a certain time, but——”

“But Dora Fane is within a few months of thirty,” interrupted Dora, bitterly, “and having missed all better chances in her youth, must marry the first decent man who offers to her, or be a poor dependant for life. You need not be afraid of *that*, Katharine! I would fifty times sooner go on the stage, when you marry, than have to live upon my relations any longer; indeed, I am not sure I wouldn't sooner do it than marry

a man like Steven Lawrence. The disgrace to Bella would be greater," cried Dot, with a flash of the eyes, "and I should be more amused myself. I like the stage, and everything belonging to it, and I loathe the country, and everything belonging to it—yeomen especially."

And genuine tears came into Dora Fane's eyes as she stood and stared disconsolately at the fire. "Me in a farm-house!" she broke out, as Katharine kept silent. "Me going to a disgusting meeting-house! Me, with my delicate chest, on that bleak Kent coast from one year's end to the other. I wish I was dead. I wish I had been left among the people who suited me in Paris. What do I care for the good name of all the Fanes or Hilliards who ever lived? What benefit will my old family ever be to me, I should like to know?"

"None at all, my dear Dora," answered Katharine, kindly. "The happiness of your own future life is all I care about, and I do think you would be happier married, and living quietly in a home of your own now—yes, even if that home was a Kentish farm. The meeting-house you need not go to, unless you choose, and I don't see how Ashcot can be much bleaker than the Dene,

where you have lived in very tolerable health for the last fifteen years of your life."

"And I," said Dot, "think that you are altogether mistaken. I am not one of those women whose ideas of happiness are marriage, marriage, and again marriage! If I marry a man I don't like, I shall be miserable, and make him miserable too. Marriage without love—although you do call me half French—is a crime in my eyes," said Dot, loftily.

"I am glad to hear you speak so, Dot," was Katharine's answer, "When you wrote to Mr. Lawrence, when I received him here on his arrival, I certainly thought you were prepared to like him. You do not, it seems. The matter is at an end."

"I wish you wouldn't take me up so, Katharine. I'm not clever like you, and I can't argue, and I'm sure, Kate, you are the last person who ought to be hard on any one for being changeable! I don't at all wish to give up poor Steven Lawrence, if I was sure of his intentions, and I can't help liking people who are unworthy, and—and I have been very badly treated!" cried Dot, dissolving in earnest now. "You may talk of Frenchwomen as you like. I don't think any Frenchwoman could flirt more than



Arabella does. If she calls it high-principled, I do not! Why doesn't she look after her children? Why doesn't she let the poor dear old General have a home by his own fireside? Tell me that, Katharine!"

"The poor old General prefers his club, as you know very well, Dot, and Bella, far from neglecting her children, is devoted to them. I think her an admirable wife," said Katharine, warmly. "There are few women as handsome, and as much sought after as Bella, of whom the world speaks so well. As to flirtation, I hate ever to hear the word applied to a married woman at all!"

"You may hate the word, but Bella does not hate the thing," cried Dot, firing more and more. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Kate, but I will say, that if there is one quality I *despise* more than another in a woman, it is hypocrisy; and Bella has behaved with cruel—yes, cruel—hypocrisy as regards Clarendon Whyte. When he first used to come to this house did he, or did he not, like me best, Katharine? I ask you frankly."

"I should say Clarendon Whyte never liked anything living except himself," answered Katharine. "His heart seems to me to be just as empty as his head. You

are not——” and she laid her hand kindly on her cousin's, “Dora, it is not possible that you care really for such a man?”

“It matters little whether I do or not,” said Dot. “To-night—well, Kate, you never betray anything, and I don't mind telling you the truth—to-night I *did* believe that he was going to speak. Something he said last night gave me the right to think so; and of course, if he had, there would have been nothing of dishonour, as things stand now between me and Mr. Lawrence, in my accepting him. I've been very uncertain of late, and I tried to keep—I mean I did not want to give absolute discouragement to anybody. You understand?”

Katharine nodded shortly.

“And now, to-night, you saw Bella's conduct; talking to him the whole evening; turning his brain,” Katharine's eyes looked an interjection, “as she can, in her quiet manner, when she chooses; and of course I am farther from him than ever! Do you call it honour, Katharine? I won't use the word you dislike to hear applied to your sister; I simply ask this: *do* you call it honour?”

“If I could hear Bella's account of it, I should probably call the whole thing sheer ab-

surdity," said Katharine coolly. "As if Bella would stoop to any small meanness! as if Bella could care, except as an escort to and from her carriage, for a man like Mr. Whyte. He happened to murmur rather more about himself, and about his conquests, into her ear than into yours to-night, Döt, and you are weak enough to be angry. If it were otherwise—if I could believe for a moment that you ever had a serious thought of marrying Clarendon Whyte, and that Bella, directly or indirectly, kept you from doing so, I say that you should thank her as the best friend you have. In the first place, as you know, Mr Whyte is poor, and poverty for the wife of a man like that would be simple and utter misery."

"Yet you advise me to marry Steven Lawrence?"

"Indeed I do not, Dora. After what you have been saying, I should be very sorry to advise you to marry any one. Steven Lawrence's fortune, humble as it is, might, with his habits, enable him to keep his wife in comfort. Mr. Whyte's fortune, with his habits, would, I should think, ensure to *his* wife starvation! So much I do say."

"You have grand ideas, Kate. You forget that every one cannot marry men like

Lord Petres. If—if—Clarendon Whyte had asked me," cried poor little Dot, sadly, "I would have married him, and done the best I could. I like him, allez! He has brains enough for me. You know I don't care for the way any of your friends talk. I never pretend to be clever. Even Steven Lawrence, though I dare say he can hardly read and write, bores me; I suppose because he is intelligent. I hate intelligence. I hate to hear about those horrid tropical beasts and plants, just as I should hate to have to go to the British Museum and look at them, and it's all acting when I pretend to be interested in such things."

"And what do you care heartily for, Dot dear? I have often wished to know."

"I care for Clarendon Whyte's conversation, Katharine. He talks of things that are really interesting."

"Of himself, that is to say, Dot? For one evening of my life, very long ago, I brought myself to listen to Clarendon Whyte's conversation, and, in as far as that distressing impediment of speech of his allowed me to follow him, I found that all his dark hints and little fragments of narrative told one story—the number of his conquests, and the quantity of peace of mind that he had wrecked."

"Well, and if it was true!" interrupted Dora. "Can a man help being handsome, and gifted with that sort of fatal influence, I should like to know?"

"True or false, Dot, I think an honest man would keep perfect silence on such a theme. To boast, even mentioning no names, of such conquests, seems to me untrue to all our English ideas of manliness. For a girl, talking among girls, to make much of her little ball-room triumphs, may pass, though I should not think over-highly of one who did. For a man to seek the reputation which that man seeks, he must be—a Mr. Clarendon Whyte! I can say nothing stronger."

"But still, you see, I like him," said poor Dot, with unanswerable logic. "I haven't your views of Englishmen and English honour. You say sometimes Clarendon Whyte is like the hero of a bad French novel. I dare say he is, and I dare say that is why he suits me. I haven't the Fane nature—there is the truth. Your beau-ideal of happiness is to spend six weeks of the year in London, and the remainder at a country house, among wet fields, with dogs and guns and hunters. Mine is a little apartment on the fifth—sixth, seventh, if you will, but in Paris;

and never to stir out of Paris till I die."

"And Clarendon Whyte for a companion?"

"Clarendon Whyte, or some one else of his low intellectual standard; some one, at least, who would like what I liked, and always be well dressed and distinguished-looking, when we happened to go out together, and never want to come back to England. You think me a greater fool than I am, Katharine. In a life like that, I could make any sacrifice for my husband: live on bread and salad—and I know the meaning of what I say—anything, so that he could have his distractions, and me, mine, *bien entendu*! English middle-class comfort; heavy joints every day; suet puddings for the servants; plain dress and no amusements for the master and mistress—I hate it! I hate the very thought of it!" cried Dot, clenching one of her small fists. "And I hate the evil chance that first took me from a life that suited me better."

"Dot," said Katharine, colouring, "that is ill said of you. Dislike England and English people if you will, but don't deny that papa has been your truest friend. Don't say that the home he gave you at the Dene was worse than the home from which he took you."

"I know that it has been a worse one to me," said Dot, unblushingly. Gratitude was not one of the virtues this poor little warped nature possessed. "If I had stayed in the Faubourg Saint Marceau, I should have grown up a bourgeoisie, of the smallest bourgeoisie, if you like—a milliner making up caps of six sous, who knows? but Parisienne! Parisienne!"

A glow of real feeling, which became her better than all rouge and gold-dust, came across her face. "Fifteen years! fifteen years of youth, I should have been living, not existing!"

"And what about the future, Dot?" asked Katharine; "all this might have been very well while your youth lasted, but for the future?"

"I should have died in Paris, at least," said Dot, quietly. "There is no use talking to you, Katharine. You English don't care a bit really for your country, or why should you run over the world as you do to get away from it? Love of Paris, with us Parisiennes"—she seemed to grow an inch taller as she said this—"is a passion. I'm like the queen—who was it?—when I die 'Paris' will be written on my heart! and, in the meantime, I shall marry Steven Law-

rence of Aschot—when he is wearied, that is to say, of his hopeless adoration of my beautiful cousin Katharine.”

She laughed, one of those loud shrill laughs, which came with such weird want of music from her small throat and baby mouth, and, kneeling down by Katharine's side, stretched out her little hands to the fire.

“Does Steven Lawrence really amuse you, as the tailor-poet did, Kate? or are you trying to make me accept him, as you used to make me take my draughts when I had the influenza, do you remember, by tasting them first, and pretending you liked them? When I saw you leave the box on his arm to-night, I could not help asking myself what the meaning of all the little play was. Katharine Fane—Lady Petres in a few months' time—showing herself before half London, on the arm of Steven Lawrence, yeoman farmer, of the parish of Clithero, Kent!”

“The meaning of the ‘little play,’” said Katharine, stoutly, “is that Katharine Fane chose to please herself, just as she will continue to do when she is Lady Petres! If I had left Steven Lawrence to the tender mercies of you and Bella, you would, either of you, have thrown him over, if any one you thought better of had offered you an arm.



And I did not choose that he should be thrown over ! Putting your affairs altogether aside, Dot, I mean that Steven Lawrence shall be well treated in our house. Papa is sure to get on with him : Lord Petres likes him : I like him myself. As to being seen by half London on the arm of a yeoman, I would just as soon be seen there as on the arm of a duke. You know very well whether I have any nonsense of that kind in me or not."

"You are in a position where it is graceful to show humility, Katharine. The future wife of Lord Petres can afford, better than most women, to play at socialism—for as to believing any, yes, any Englishwoman is not an aristocrat at heart, I don't ! Now confess, Kate, as we are telling plain truths to-night, that you did feel ashamed of being seen with Steven Lawrence ? I shan't think a bit the worse of you. Say it out."

"As we are speaking plain truths," said Katharine, "I will confess that I felt unaffectedly proud of Steven Lawrence the whole time that I was with him. It seemed to me that half the people in the crowd turned to look at him, Dot. Old Madame de Castro whispered to me in her bad English that I was on the arm of the only handsome man

she had seen in England; the Phantom fought her way with her usual energy through the mob to ask me if 'our friend' would be in town for Lady Dacres' ball on the first? and how unconscious Steven Lawrence himself was of it all!"

"What! the Countess de Castro really said that of Steven Lawrence?" cried Dot. "The Phantom really offered to get him an invitation to the Dacres' ball? Well, you know, I do think him very handsome myself! I do think, by the time he gets more manner and style, he will be almost distinguished-looking. What did he say when you told him about Lady Dacres' ball?"

"I never told him about it at all, Dora. I can imagine no greater cruelty than to tempt a man like Steven Lawrence into going to a great London party. Why (as we shall be out of town), the poor fellow would not have a single person to speak to the whole night."

"As we shall be out of town!" repeated Dot, looking very blank. "Why, when do you mean to go home, Kate?"

"To-morrow, Dot, please. Now that Lord Petres is gone, I don't see the object of my staying any longer—and I know Bella wants my room for some terrible maiden cousin of the General's; the rich Miss Dering who

has been godmother to the whole of the children and never given anything but an illuminated book-marker between them yet! But my going has nothing to do with yours, unless you choose."

"Thank you, Katharine. If your sister would take me to every party and theatre in town, I would not stay under her roof when you are gone. To-night has opened my eyes to the extent of Arabella's *friendship* for me. And so to-morrow we return to our eleven months of country! Oh, dear! I suppose I may as well be off to bed. I shan't sleep, but there is nothing more to talk about here. What a weary play life is!" And Dot rose, yawned drearily, and then stooped and kissed her cousin on each cheek. Whatever small French customs the poor little thing had been allowed to retain—this among others—she clung to with almost touching pertinacity.

When she had got into the passage a sudden thought seemed to cross Dot's brain; and, turning the lock noiselessly, she re-entered her cousin's room, and walked back again to the fireside. Katharine, believing herself to be alone for the night, was already upon her knees at her prayers; and Dot had to tap her sharply on the shoulder twice be-

fore she could recall her to the things of this world.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Katharine—though how people can go in a moment from frivolous talk to religion is what I don't understand—but there's something I particularly want to ask you. Did—did—" Dora Fane actually had the grace to be half confused—"did Steven Lawrence say anything to you about the photograph I sent him?"

"My dear Dora," said Katharine, looking up from her kneeling position with beautiful dignity, "I have asked you before not to break in upon me like this. You would not interrupt me if I was kneeling at any earthly throne."

"Because I should not have the chance," cried Dot, another of whose missing virtues was reverence. "Please, Kate, don't look so severe. If you prayed extempore, like Bella and the General, it would be different, but your high-church paters and aves can surely be taken up at any point where you like to break off. Now, did Steven Lawrence say anything about the photograph? I won't keep you a moment."

"He showed it to me, Dora," said Katharine, with austere abruptness. Was it to be

expected that she could treat any matter forced upon her at such a time with levity ?

“ Showed it ?—does he carry it about with him ? Oh, Katharine dear, does he wear it ?”

“ He does. In a locket.”

“ And—thinks it like ?”

“ Very like.”

“ And—you didn’t tell him anything, Kate ? It was very foolish of me, but you know people say, in photographs, how alike we are—and I had not a copy of mine left—and really I never thought of anything serious at that time. Now, you didn’t betray me ?”

“ I don’t see what I had to betray, Dora.”

“ And Mr. Lawrence seems satisfied ?”

“ Very. Still as he is neither devoid of reason nor eyesight, I should, if I were in your place, explain the whole mistake to him at the first opportunity that offered itself.”

“ Good-night to you, Katharine.”

“ Good-night to you, Dora.”

And then Dot took herself off for good to her own apartment (to fall asleep in five minutes and dream that she was a Parisian stage fairy with a parterre of men like Mr. Clarendon Whyte all throwing her bouquets), and Katharine Fane was left to finish her meditations in peace.

They kept her up later than usual to-night ;

for after what Dot called the “paters and aves,” came a long prayer—the original of which was never learnt from any prayer-book or missal!—and when the beautiful face was lifted at last, unmistakeable traces of tears were on her cheeks. “Poor Dot’s restless heart shall be brought to happiness yet, if I can help her there,” she thought, as she laid her head on her pillow. “When—when I am married, they shall both come to stay with me, and in time I will bring Dot back to the true faith—and, perhaps. . . .”

And she slept, and dreamed of an old farmhouse, and harvest-time, and Steven!—the pleasantest dream that Katharine Fane had ever dreamed in her life; but one from which the figures of Lord Petres and her cousin Dora were both, by some strange accident, missing!

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE RETURN TO ASHCOT.

THE east wind that had driven Lord Petres out of England was gone; soft rains had fallen in the night; and all the Kentish lowlands were smelling sweet of summer, as Steven on the following afternoon drove from the village station, six or eight miles beyond Canterbury, to his old home.

He knew every object along the road by which he had to pass; the "two-bridges" that side by side, crossed the Stour and the canal; the cleft in the schoolhouse wall through which the knotted ivy-roots had made no perceptible progress since he was a boy; the little roadside hamlet half way to Clithero, with its low red roofs and stagnant horse-pond and churchyard to whose white slabs ten years seemed scarcely to have made an increase; how strangely familiar it all was! Here and there, among the

middle-aged and old, he came across a face he knew ; but no answering look of recognition met him anywhere ; the young people and children were of course absolute strangers, all ; and Steven felt with a sort of pang that he belonged to a bygone generation as he looked at them. Would the people at Ashcot, would old Barbara, who had rocked him in his cradle, remember him if he was to appear suddenly in his own house without telling them what name he bore ? An unwise fancy for trying the experiment took hold upon him as he drew near home ; and as soon as he reached the first outlying cottages of the village of Clithero he stopped, discharged the carriage he had hired at the station, and going into a little vine-covered public-house by the roadside, asked the fresh-looking country girl who was standing within the bar, for a glass of ale.

The girl was about nineteen years of age, and as she handed the handsome stranger his tankard, with a blush and a smile, Steven Lawrence remembered her face, and how a dozen years ago she had been one of the many child-sweethearts whose affections he had possessed in Clithero. Had she forgotten the very sound of his name ? he wondered ; was she called Polly—had she



a real sweetheart now? He looked down at the girl's left hand, and saw with a childish feeling of satisfaction that it carried no ring. She was not married then. Little Polly Barnes, at least, remained out of the old buried life of his boyhood! Somewhat shyly he hazarded a remark or two about the neighbourhood, and Polly, setting him down as a tourist, began at once, with professional volubility, to make the most of all the great people within her small reach. It had been very dull in the country this spring, but most of the good families were coming back now. Lord Haverstock returned yesterday, and the Miss Fanes were expected in a day or two. The gentleman had heard of the Miss Fanes, of course?

Yes; the gentleman was familiar with the name.

Miss Katharine—or, indeed, Miss Fane, for poor Miss Dora was only a cousin—was to be married in the autumn to my Lord Petres, one of the richest noblemen in England, and a Catholic, which Miss Fane had always been inclined to, it being her own papa's religion, and it was expected it would be a very grand wedding, and—

“And what other people live about here now?” said Steven, cutting Polly short in

her aristocratic histories. "I mean people of the lower class. Who holds Brenton farm?"

"Brenton farm? la, sir, what you know the neighbourhood then? Oh, old Tillyer leases Brenton still. He has leased it for the last five and twenty years, I've heard my father say."

"And Ashcot?"

The girl shook her head. "Ashcot, sir, at present is farmed by Francis Dawes; but it belongs, you know, to the Lawrences. You've heard tell of them, no doubt?"

"I have," said Steven, "often heard their name. Joshua Lawrence is dead, I suppose?"

"Dead—yes, and his son, young Josh, after him," answered Polly; "broke his neck, as half the Lawrences do, sir, when he wasn't over sober; and now the land belongs to one Steven Lawrence, an idle, good-for-nothing sort of chap, I believe—ran away when he was a boy through jealousy of his cousin Josh, and nothing good been heard of him since. They do say he's expected home again now; but father thinks he's more likely to sell the farm for what it will fetch than come back and work on it. The Lawrences were always a bad lot, sir. Grandfather remembers them fifty years

agone, and he says, grandfather does, in spite of their Wesleying ways, that running ashore a cargo of French silks and brandies on a dark night, and without giving the Queen her dues, was always the vocation" (Polly had been to boarding-school) "best suited to a Lawrence."

A quickly-checked smile came round the corners of Steven's mouth. Old Jacob Barnes, he remembered well, had, in his day, been one of the most noted smugglers of the whole coast, from Deal to Pegwell; and as he smiled, the girl looked at him fixedly.

"I—I'm almost certain I've seen your face before, sir!" she cried. "Surely, it can't be? oh, la!" and Polly's round cheeks got crimson.

"Surely, it can't be Steven Lawrence himself!" said Steven, with his hearty laugh. "The idle, good-for-nothing kind of chap who ran away through jealousy of his cousin Josh? Ah, Polly, you're nicely caught. In spite of their 'Wesleying ways,' no occupation so fitted to a Lawrence as running ashore a cargo of French brandies without giving the Queen her dues! Now suppose, just to make up, and in remembrance of old days, you give me a kiss,

Polly?" And Steven caught Miss Barnes's plump red hand and stooped his head down to her level. "You and I are very old sweethearts, you must remember?" he whispered.

"Oh, sir! Mr. Steven, please!" cried the girl, snatching her hand away from him; "you must excuse me for all I said, and—and everything else, sir. Times are changed, Mr. Steven, and—I was asked in church for the first time last Sunday. Peter Nash, sir, please, of the Mill."

Polly Barnes—the baby Polly, who used to teaze to overload him with her kisses—"asked in church." Will you believe me when I say that Steven Lawrence felt a pang of actual pain at the thought? Polly Barnes blushing and looking conscious about Peter Nash of the Mill, the red-haired young ruffian whose head had so often received condign punishment from his own knuckles in the days when Peter had been wont to convey, by hideous faces and aggressive pantomime of all kind at meeting-house, his utter derision for Steven's turn-down collars and general fastidiousness of dress! How absolutely null, from Katharine Fane down to little Polly Barnes, was his share in any human being's life! how entirely

unmoved the whole world would have been if the 'Oneida' had foundered at sea, instead of bringing back the idle good-for-nothing Steven Lawrence safe to his native land. What a mistake this experiment was of gauging by too sharp a test the kind of remembrance in which his early friends held him! Better have given them all timely notice; better have had the fatted calf killed; better have been met, after his ten years of exile, with the outward welcome due to the repentant prodigal at least.

He left little Polly gazing after him, her hand shading the sunlight from her blue eyes, on the threshold of the inn door ("quite the gentleman now," thinks Polly, in her simplicity; "I shouldn't wonder if Lucy Mason, with all her pride, was to take a fancy to him!"): and in another ten minutes stood at the same angle of the old London road from whence he had looked back through his boyish tears at Ashcot, on that April night, ten years ago, when he believed himself to be quitting it for ever. The low white house, the homely garden, with the sweet May sunshine shining on its flowers, were unchanged; here at least was comfort! Whatever else had passed away, home was the old home still; and a feeling

nearer akin to womanly weakness than he had known for years came with a sudden flood across the yeoman's stout heart as he stood and looked at it. He pushed his way through a gap in the flowering untidy hedge; there were a great many gaps in the hedges around Ashcot now; and a thrill almost like the thrill of love went through his blood. He was standing on his own land once more! How fresh the grass fields looked, knee-deep in blood-red sorrel and foaming meadow-sweet, and with their tangled hedges of wild hop, briar and hawthorn!—Steven felt as a man, not a farmer, in this moment—how much fairer in his eyes was all this vivid English verdure than the bewildering exotic gorgeousness of the tropics, with which his eyes had grown sated! With what subtle power the delicate half-bitter aroma of the hawthorn touched his brain and brought back, as only the sense of smell can do, before him a hundred pictures: each bright and distinct, yet blending all mysteriously into one: of the happy springs before Josh and his mother ever came to Ashcot! He marched on through the tall weed-grown grass down towards the house, and a small boy at work in the next field, happening to spy him, threw up his arms in

the air, and shouted out to him that he was trespassing! (When I use the expression "at work," I use it in its most restricted and relative sense. No one worked much at Ashcot now; only, the boy happening to be a nephew of Dawes, the estate was charged with eightpence a day for providing him in birds'-nesting, rat-hunting, and other rural means of passing his time). Steven was immensely tickled at the idea of being warned as a trespasser off his own land, and sang out such a loud cheery "all right!" by way of answer, that the urchin concluded he was some friend of his uncle's, privileged to trample down standing grass or any other crop he chose, and went back to his present labour of threading birds' eggs on a reed with philosophic calmness.

"The place hasn't what I should call a look of work about it," thought Steven, as he neared the house and marked the broken-down fence and straggling branches of the little orchard, once so trim and orderly. "Four o'clock in the afternoon—the men can't be gone home yet—and not a soul to be seen. They must be at work round in the five-acres." And pushing open a wicket-gate, so shaky that it almost lurched off its hinges under his hand, he entered one of

the side walks of the garden, the garden that had once been Mrs. Steven's special pride, and where, in Steven's childhood, every flower strong enough to bear the rough foreland blasts had been tended with loving care.

It was not, like the farm lands, actually neglected as yet ; the borders were free from weeds, the walks were not grass-grown, such hardy spring flowers as wanted no especial nurture were in bright flower in the beds ; the lilacs and guelder-roses above the parlour-window were all a mass of clustering odorous blossom. Steven walked round to the front porch, never doubting that he would see the door wide open, as in old days, the cheerful afternoon sun shining in upon the houseplace. The door, however, was not only shut but locked. The blinds in the front windows were all down ; not a sound but the distant wash of the tide upon the sands, the humming of the great wild-bees among the honeysuckles that covered the porch broke silence. " Is a funeral going on ? " thought Steven, " or doesn't Barbara take the trouble of living here, or what ? Let no man try the experiment of coming back a day sooner than he is expected to his own house again ! " He gave a long impatient pull at the bell, and on



the instant a shrill chorus of pugnacious barks made itself heard within. After this came a woman's voice—how well he knew it!—bidding the dogs “be silent, with their foolishness,” and then the door opened, as far as a stout door-chain would allow, and he was requested by some unseen speaker, three or four sets of vicious teeth showing themselves ready through the chink for his legs, to make his pleasure known.

“My pleasure, Barbara,” said Steven, as if he had not been absent a day, “is to come in. What the deuce is the meaning of all these bolts and bars and yelping curs, that you have taken to since I left?”

“Master—*Master Steven!*” cried the voice, a whole world of welcome in its tone. “Dear heart, that you should come like this—and me not so much as begun the cleaning!” And the chain was slipped, the dogs with one or two vigorous kicks were sent to the right-about, and an erect, handsome old peasant woman, her face white and quivering with emotion, came out into the porch. “Master Steenie—my boy—sir, how you have grown! but the same face, the same smile still!”

Steven seized both her hands in his, then kissed the withered fine old cheek, just as he

used to do when he came home, a little lad, for the holidays, to be at once the torment and the pride of Barbara's life. "And so you remembered me at once, Barbara!" he said, as she clung to him, and gazed up in silence at his bronzed manly face—so fair and boyish when she saw it last. "I knew you wouldn't expect me for another week, at least, and I just thought I'd come upon you unawares and frighten you a bit. I met a good many faces I knew as I drove along from the station, Barbara, but I could see that I was a stranger to them all. You knew me by my voice alone."

"Knew you, Steenie? why I should have known you among ten thousand; and to think you should have come so! that you should have been made to wait on your own doorstep! Get along, Vixen—let me catch you sniffing anigh your master again, miss! 'Tis lonesome at Ashcot now, Steenie," added Barbara, in apology for the dog's ignorance, "and of an afternoon I mostly bar the door and let the dogs out to protect the house like. But please to come in, sir," she interrupted herself, breaking suddenly from familiarity to respect. "There's no fire in the parlour, but I can catch one up in a minute, and——"

"And what's gone of the kitchen, then?"

interrupted Steven, walking straight on through the houseplace—wonderfully low this houseplace had become! he had to stoop his head not to knock it against the centre rafter now. “Have folks grown so fine of late years, that they must sit all day in the parlour, or what?”

And pushing open a door, he entered the comfortable old farm kitchen, where his grandfather’s armchair still stood beside the open fireplace, his grandfather’s watch still hung suspended over the mantelshelf, and felt himself at home! He had not felt so before since his arrival in England. The landing at Southampton; the short, too sweet episode of London and of Katharine Fane; his drive to-day among changed and unknown faces from the station; the first moment, even, in which he had trodden upon his own land; all had savoured of unreality—all in different ways had reminded him that he, Steven Lawrence, was an alien, and that his own country and his own people knew him not. Here, in the old farm kitchen, by the fireside where the Christmas songs of twenty years ago had been sung, with Barbara, unaltered in face, and dressed in the same prim methodist fashion as of old at his side: the great clock ticking with its familiar burr, the

jugs and dishes ranged in precisely the same order as they used to be upon the shelves ; he felt that a place was still kept for him in the world. The past was at length bound up visibly, before his senses, with the present. He was at home.

"You look younger than ever, Barbara." And as he spoke he seated himself in the corner that was always called "Steenie's" when he was a child, and turned kindly to the old servant, who with wet eyes stood aloof and admired him, while she held a corner of her apron tight upon her trembling lips. "You, and the place by the fireside here, seem the only old friends I have left."

"Ay, lad, you may say so," she answered, coming close to him, but with instinctive delicacy remaining standing ; for Barbara, like Polly Barnes, decided that Steven looked quite the gentleman now. "The Lord has pruned away the unprofitable branches. 'Woe to him,' we read, Steven, 'that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house that he may set his nest on high.' From the first day that I seen Mrs. Joshua—and an unhandier woman, and a foolisher, no ill respect to the dead, never entered a house—locking up here, and locking up there, as though those who had served her husband's

family faithful would have stooped to rob *her*, and wasteful in her own ways as her son was after her—from the first day as I seen a fine lady flaunting about the farm, in her black sating and gold chain, and setting up her pony-shay and going to church, ay, and taking young Josh, a Lawrence by blood, with her ‘because the gentry didn’t go to meeting-house,’ I said to your mother, ‘Mrs. Steven,’ I said, ‘those that live long enough ’ll see want and ruin brought home to the Lawrences.’ And my words were true ones, Steenie.”

“Not quite, I hope, Barbara,” answered Steven, cheerfully. “Josh didn’t do over well for himself, I know, and I dare say I shall find things a good bit in arrears, but while the land’s mine, and I’ve an arm to work it, I don’t think we need talk of ruin, or want coming near you and me. Is Dawes about the rick-yard, or where? I must send one of the carts over for my luggage to the station, but I didn’t see man or boy at work on the whole farm as I came down the close.”

Barbara took her apron away from her lips, and passed it along the edge of the kitchen-dresser, already white and spotless as a new-washed platter. “Dawes is not

here, Master Steven, nor the men neither, and there's no one at work. Me, and, maybe, young Bill Dawes, birds-nesting, are the only souls on the farm to-day."

Steven watched the expression of the old servant's face, as she answered him, and a quick suspicion of the truth crossed his mind. "Are the potatoes hoed, Barbara? is there no work of any kind going on? The hill side is potato-set this year, I see, but the ridges didn't strike me as looking over clean, from the distance."

"Master Steven," said Barbara, holding up her head erect, and folding her arms tight across her chest; "you musn't ask me how things are done on the farm now, sir. Except to tidy up a bit about the garden, for respect of those that are gone, and of you too, my dear, far away though you were, I haven't left the house from one Lord's day to another, since Josh died. If I was to give my opinion, Steven, speaking from general knowledge of Dawes and his ways, I should say the potatoes was *not* weeded, nor hoed, nor anything done to them since they was planted. If you came down along the vicar's close and seen the grass, that rank and weed-grown as was the finest bit of hay for miles round, you needn't ask many

more questions about the farm, I should say."

Steven got up and walked to the open kitchen-window, from whence the greater part of Ashcot farm was visible, and, at a glance, he took in its condition. The straggling fences, the wild rank grass, the partial growth of the green corn, the unhoed potato-fields—all, now that his eyes had got back the old business habit of seeing things, cried out aloud of neglect, of an unjust steward, of an absent master. He stood for a minute or more without speaking, then came back to the fire-side, and stood there, his broad shoulders resting back against the high old-fashioned mantelshelf, took out a pipe from his breast-pocket, and lit it.

"Barbara," said he, after he had smoked for two or three minutes, in silence, "I see pretty well how things stand. The cure will be short and sharp. How long has Francis Dawes treated the land like this?"

"Always, Master Steven," answered Barbara, laconically. "It was a year or so after you ran—after you left, sir, that your uncle first took him, him and his," and Barbara's eyes kindled, "upon the farm. Mister Joshua was failing in body and heart—there's the truth of it. What with his wife, and her

fine-lady ways, and young Josh's wildness, and your leaving us, Steenie, he wasn't to say the same for years before his death, and Dawes, bit by bit, got to do as he liked on the farm. Then came Mrs. Joshua's death, and your uncle's, and young Josh, who knew no more about the farm than a baby, was master."

"Go on: Dawes robbed the lad?"

"Steven," said old Barbara, "'rob' is not a word to use lightly. Everything on the place lay, as you may say, under Dawes' hand, and—"

"And he abused his trust? Speak out, Barbara."

Barbara hesitated, and her fingers twitched a little at the white kerchief that was pinned across her breast. To toil, to save for the Lawrences, had been, for more than thirty years, the beginning and end of her life. To see Steven back in his rightful place, and Dawes dispossessed, had been the one hope which had kept her steadfastly to the farm since young Josh's death. But it was a part of Barbara's religion to speak positive ill of no man. The Lord could execute His judgments, she was accustomed to say, without help or hindrance of hers. Steven might see with his own eyes the rank weed-grown



meadows. Basing her opinion on broad and general grounds, Barbara did not hesitate to state that the potatoes had neither been weeded nor hoed once since they were planted. Such words as robbery or betrayal of trust, could scarcely have been evoked by less than torture from her lips.

"I reprove no man, Steven, and I rejoice in no man's fall. You will see the state of the farm, you will cast up Francis Dawes' accounts with him, and judge for yourself of the man's stewardship."

"That will I," said Steven, promptly, "The state of the farm I have seen. The accounts, poor scholar though I am, I'll overhaul with Dawes to-night."

"Not to-night, Steven. Dawes and his sons are away to Stourmouth fair, and when they return 'twill be late, and—"

"And what else, Barbara?"

"Francis Dawes won't be just in a state to look over account-books with you, Steven—there's the truth."

"I see. We'll have them out to-morrow."

"To-morrow is the Sabbath, sir."

"I forgot," said Steven, hastily; "I've lived a life, Barbara, that has made me forget the days of the week sometimes; you do right to remind me. Monday, then, shall

be the day of reckoning ; and now—now let us talk of other things. How did my uncle die, and Josh ? I believe when I was young, I was harsh on the boy. There was no other evil in him than being his mother's son, I believe."

" Evil enough," said Barbara, solemnly, " evil enough, the Lord knows ! When once a lad has his head set up above his rank, and begins to hanker after the ways and follies of the gentry, Steven, he's pretty sure to end as Josh did."

Steven winced. " I should have thought from what they wrote me, Barbara, that Josh's vices were entirely his own. He didn't exactly contract his taste for gambling or drinking, by hankering after the ways of the gentry, I should say !"

" Master Steven, poor young Josh was gay—small blame to the boy, perhaps, taking into account the bringing up he got ! There's no doubt of it," repeated Barbara, but with extreme leniency of tone, " young Josh was gay. But it wasn't that alone, nor foremost, that brought him to ruin. There's many a lad has begun as bad or worse than him, and come right enough in the end, so long as he kept himself to the condition that was good enough for his fathers

before him. While Josh only kept company with young Peter Nash and the other lads about, he was no worse than the rest, but once he had fallen in with Lord Haverstock he just walked on straight and opened-eyed to perdition, Steven. French wines for dinner, brandy and stuff o' the chemists the first thing in the morning; horse-races, cock-fighting, cards on the Sabbath evening, and a drunkard's death before he was twenty-one—that's about what lords and gentry did for Josh Lawrence!"

Steven knocked out the ashes from his pipe, and examined its bowl curiously before putting it back into his pocket. This kind of talk about lords and gentry jarred somehow, with extraordinary harshness, upon his present state of mind.

"Lord Haverstock was in petticoats when I left, Barbara. It makes me feel my age to hear you talk of him and little Josh as grown up men. How are the other families going on; the Squire, and his daughters?—the Miss Fanes, I would say."

Steven was not a coward under most circumstances, but it would have required greater courage than he possessed to tell Barbara that the Miss Fanes had known before his own people of his arrival, and

that he had been with them to a London theatre; hankering already, like young Josh, after the ways and follies of the gentry!

"The Squire keeps his health, Steven, I thank you, and his lady hers, such as it is. Katharine Fane is to be married soon to Lord Petres, a poor little white-faced creature, as high as that," said old Barbara, holding her large hand out level with her waist. "Never goes about without a French vally-de-shom, and a French cook for to mince up his meats for him, but as old a family as any in England, and rich, and a papist, so Miss Katharine will have her wishes at last."

"And the other one—Dora?"

"Dora's unmarried still, and like to remain so, from all I hear. What makes you so keen to ask about the Fanes, Steven?" and Barbara looked at him suspiciously.

"What makes me ask about the Fanes?" said Steven, with a short laugh; "why, idle curiosity, I suppose; the same that made me ask about everybody else. I'll tell you what I've a much keener interest in just now than any news of lords and gentry," he added, "and that is what you can give me for dinner. I've had nothing since eight

o'clock this morning, and I'm as hungry as a hawk."

The colour mounted into old Barbara's face. "If you had given me a day's notice, Steven; but—well, lad, the truth's the quickest thing to tell—I shan't have much, unless you can wait an hour or so, to put before you. The Dawes' live in their part of the house, as you may say, and find themselves; and I live in mine, and find myself: and I was never one, as you know, to care much for butcher's meat. I'll run off to the village, and get in your dinner for to-morrow and to-day at once, and—"

"And if I hadn't come, what would your own Sunday dinner have been, Barbara?"

"A cup of tea, and a slice of bread and butter, is as good a dinner as I want, Steven. The smell of them Dawes' baked joints, hot on the Lord's day, is always enough to set my stomach against flesh-meat. You wouldn't take a cup of tea now, sir? just to stay your hunger, as I'm obliged to keep you waiting."

"Yes, indeed, I will," said Steven, heartily, "if you will take one with me, and help you to set it, too. Are the cups kept in the same cupboard still, Barbara?"

"Oh, Master Steven!" cried the old ser-

vant, when Stephen had helped her with the kettle, and was cutting huge trenches of bread and butter, just as he used to do when he was a schoolboy; "to think that you should have come back like this! When I first seen you, dear, I thought—"

"Thought what, Barbara? Have it out."

"That you had grown to be a fine gentleman like Josh, Steenie? but you haven't."

"I haven't, indeed, Barbara," said Steven, simply. "I'm not, and never shall be, a gentleman, but I believe, unlike Josh, I am thoroughly well-contented as I am."

And then the poor fellow thought, with a sudden pang, of Katharine, and of the world that Katharine would live in, and said no more.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CHURCH AND CHAPEL.

THE next day was Sunday, and the news of Steven's return having spread like wildfire from the head centre of the Blue Peter, half the female population of Broad Clithero flocked in new summer bonnets to the village Shiloh to look at him. It was five or six minutes after service-time when he reached the chapel—the well-remembered chapel, with its weather-stained whitewashed walls, and great square windows, upon which in high and stormy tides the spray beat across the narrow road from the Channel: and Steven was conscious that a great many ribbons fluttered, a great many faces were raised above their hymn-books to give him demure looks of scrutiny as he entered. He walked to the seat occupied by the Lawrences of old at the farther end of the chapel, a side seat from whence he faced nearly the whole

of the congregation, and by the time the hymn was sung and the minister had got half way through the readings, had realised—but with a strangely blank sensation of disappointment—the life to which he had returned, and the people who were henceforth to be his associates and his equals! There was Polly Barnes, with apple-green ribbons on her hat, sitting by her sheepish red-headed lover's side (for Polly, a churchwoman by birth, had taken openly to dissent since her engagement); and Miss Lyte, the minister's mature sister, in a pink and lilac bonnet; and old Tillyer and his wife; and Mildrum of the village shop. All the old congregation in their old seats: only with ten years more of life written on their faces, and with a whole mysterious world of difference, it seemed to Steven, between himself and them!

He sat perfectly still, wearing an edifying face of solemnity, the congregation thought, while the minister read, and with thorough and stern humility took himself to task for the disappointment, bordering close on keenest disgust, of which he was guilty. Who and what was he that he should look down upon the homely meeting-house that had been good enough for his fathers, the homely village people to whose class his



father had belonged ? Was he educated ? Was he refined ? What single advantage over the others could he boast that, after ten years of the life of a savage, he should come back and find them and their service, their unlovely chapel, and its close atmosphere, and the prospect of passing his life among them, so irrepressibly repugnant ? Were not they, in sober truth, the human creatures to whom his birth and his circumstances fitted him ? was not Katharine Fane—the unacknowledged cause of his discontent—a vision, just as far above him as the painted Virgin in the cathedral at Mexico was above the ignorant crowds whom he used to watch and pity, as they worshipped her, kneeling, from the pavement ?

When the lessons were over came more singing, and Steven joined in it, aloud, and with as much of his heart as strenuous will could command. The hymn chosen was a quaint old “Scripture Wish,” much in favour at Shiloh, of which the first verse ran thus :

“Daniel’s wisdom may we know,  
Jacob’s wrestling spirit too.  
John’s divine communion feel,  
Moses’ meekness, Martha’s zeal.  
May we with young Timothy  
Ev’ry sinful passion fly !”

Not very fine poetry ; but the voices of the

singers were in tune, their hearts in earnest ; and fond recollections of his childhood and of the days when his mother taught him to sing this very hymn began to swell in Steven's breast, long before the five verses were sung through. After this came the prayer ; a long extempore prayer, perfectly simple, perfectly adapted to the souls of which the old minister for thirty years had had the cure, and at its close a blessing was asked openly upon Steven Lawrence's return ; an assurance given that however late an erring son might come back to his Father's house, forgiveness and peace would be in store there for him still, if he did but ask for them aright.

Steven, forgetful of the primitive habits of his denomination, had in no nowise prepared himself for this kind of public ovation ; and felt more nervous than he had ever done before a Red Indian or grizzly bear in his life, when he had to stand up again and face the congregation ; nearly all of whom—the proportion of women to men in Shiloh being about five to one—showed signs of recent tears. Might he be spared in the sermon ! This was all he thought, as he kept his eyes steadfastly fixed on his book, and mechanically lifted up his voice in another hymn. Being prayed for, with the faces of the con-

gregation hidden from him, had been ordeal enough. To be preached at, with every pair of eyes in the chapel watching to see how he took it, would be a thousandfold worse; and he listened, with eagerness in which perhaps only a man who has been publicly offered up in the same way can sympathise, to hear what text the minister would give out.

It was not, as his worst forebodings had predicted, any selection from the parable of the prodigal son, but a long, and as he hoped, totally inapplicable text from Nahum (chosen, doubtless, before his return had been known) commencing "She is empty, and void and waste," and continuing—for long texts were always approved of in Shiloh—to the end of the chapter. But Steven had forgotten the peculiar talent of the good old minister for applying any given portion of inspired truth to any given human exigency, when he built his hopes on such a weak foundation as seeming irrelevancy. Beginning with an exposition of the circumstances under which the inspired denunciation was given forth against sinful Nineveh, the old man through tortuous ways, and with covert allusions that told the ears of the initiated what was coming, led his subject on to the consideration of the wastes, spiritual and

moral, that occur in our own times, in hearts given over to the world. He remarked upon the declension always to be traced in outward prosperity, whether of great nations or humble individuals, as habits of religion are neglected; finally turning round and fixing his eyes full on Steven, he spoke, in words devoid neither of pathos nor of a certain rough eloquence, of the long-forsaken duties, of the cold hearth to which a member of his flock had newly returned. He reminded them in plainest terms of how young Joshua, "drunken with wine," had been cut off in the midst of his sins and of his life; told of the mysterious wisdom which had guided Steven back by death and sorrow, even as it had guided the Israelites by a pillar of fire of old; and ended with a fervent prayer that affliction might not rise up a second time in Ashcot, that he who had gone astray might prove a chosen one of God at the last, and execute the judgment of peace and truth within His gates.

If a clergyman of the Church of England were to give a like welcome to one of his flock, nine-tenths, at least, of his hearers would be wounded by the indelicacy of such public plain-speaking. But to the simple congregation of Shiloh the minister's sermon

was a beautiful and a fitting one : and as Steven, with downcast face and a sense of being horribly and altogether out of his place, sat and listened, many and earnest were the prayers sent up that he might profit by the minister's words and become a shining light, as his grandfather (when not otherwise engaged at sea) had been before him, of the little community.

He lingered for some minutes in the chapel when the hymn succeeding the sermon was over ; his head buried in his hands, as if in prayer, almost the first hypocrisy of Steven's transparent life, and devoutly hoping that the crowd would be well dispersed by the time he left the chapel. But no such luck was in store for him. As soon as he got to the door he saw the whole congregation, from the minister downwards, standing about in groups upon the low sandy slope that separated Shiloh from the shore ; and before he had walked half a dozen steps his hands were being warmly seized, and " How d'ye do, Steven ? " " How are you, Master Lawrence ? " " Glad to see you back, sir ! " sounded on all sides, according to the sex, and age, and condition of the different speakers.

Whatever asphyxia, bodily and mental,

Steven had had to endure during the service, whatever indignation he had felt during the familiar personalities of the sermon, this hearty human kindness, the warmth of these friendly hand-pressures, of these honest voices, more than made up for it all. The minister, and the elders of the congregation, Mildrum of the shop, young Peter Nash with blushing little Polly at his side, all crowded round to offer him heartiest welcome and good wishes. Old labouring men, whom ten years scarcely seemed to have made older, held out their hard, work-em-browned palms to his; small children, prompted by their mothers, stretched up their hands for his acceptance. One sturdy little chap of three, the first-born child of an old schoolmate, Steven, to the immense increase of his popularity, hoisted aloft on his strong shoulders and carried for half a mile or more along the road; the whole of the congregation talking, as they followed in slow procession, of the wonderful way the minister had spoke up, and the miracle it was to see Steeve Lawrence, after all his wild ways, come back a decent and a God-fearing man at the last!

About half-way between the chapel and

Ashcot farm a narrow footpath led away through shady orchards and blossoming hop-fields up to the parish church, and into this path Steven turned, after bidding a friendly good-bye to such of the Shiloh people as were still in his company. The services of the church, according to country custom, were held at a later hour than those of the dissenters; and when a long up-hill walk had brought him at last to Clithero churchyard, the rector's gentlemanly unimpassioned voice, sounding through the open windows of the church told him that the sermon was still going on. He stood for a minute or more, his hat in his hand, to listen, then jumped across the rail that bounded the churchyard from the road, and made his way through the long, lush grass to the vault, close under the chancel window, where the Lawrences for generations past had been buried.

Clithero churchyard commands one of the fairest bird's-eye views on all that fair east coast of Kent. In the liquid noon light Steven could trace every well-remembered landmark of his boyish years; the marshes of Thanet, with their broad acres of tasselled reed-grass rippling in its early summer bloom; the pale grey line of coast from the

Downs to Pegwell; the far-away Goodwin Sands (which even now he could not look at without a dozen romances of storm and wreck, and gallant life-boat rescue rising before his mind), the gauzy outline of Canterbury cathedral; the undulating course of the distant Thames. . . . If the dead can be affected by their place of burial, surely none in England sleep sweeter than those who lie in this upland yard; earth, sea, and sky above and around them; and the little Saxon church, with its quiet twelfth-century face that has seen the rising and the setting of so many forgotten beliefs, to watch their rest! Steven stood, bare-headed still, beside the Lawrences' vault, whose inscriptions old Barbara's hands had kept free of moss or rust, and felt, with a sense of remorse for the heresy, a great deal more "in church" under this blue sky, and with pure oxygen filling his lungs, than he had done in Shiloh. When the sermon was ended came a psalm: no hymn of modern composition, but a good old Tate and Brady; the organ deftly played, and a rich woman's voice leading the shrill trebles of the childish choir. The voice was Katharine's; for whatever her Romish predilections, Miss Fane was still a devout



supporter openly of the Church of England; and as he listened every pulse of the yeoman's heart was set in quickened motion. I don't know—he did not know himself—whether any hope of Katharine's having returned, and of his seeing her, had mixed with his pious desire to visit the old grave in Clithero churchyard: probably he was in a state already in which some leaven of his madness made its way into every action, every thought of his life! All he knew was that he was standing here in the sunshine, listening to her voice and feeling himself in heaven, and that he would have been quite content if the whole remaining fifty-one verses of the paraphrase had been sung. Mercifully for the congregation, who were not lovers, but hungry agriculturalists—impartial dispassionate Christians, who went to the distant church, or near at hand meeting-house, indifferently, and guided chiefly by weather—forty-nine of the verses were omitted. After this came the young rector's measured Oxford-trained voice again, giving benediction: then, succeeding a decent pause, could be heard the clatter of hob-nailed shoes on the stone floor, and a minute later the old clerk pushed open the inner door of the porch; scattering, with a fierce rush, a

knot of irreverent babies who were placidly making daisy-chains in the shade; and church was "out."

Steven waited under shelter of the chancel yew until, according to the regulations of village etiquette, the whole congregation had left; first the poor people from the body of the church; then the school children and the gentry's servants from the gallery; then the farmers—very few of this class were church people in Clithero—and finally "the gentry" themselves; a tall, weak-faced young man whom, from the family likeness and universal doffing of hats, Steven took to be Lord Haverstock; after him the Squire and Dora; and lastly Katharine with the young rector, already divested of his gown, walking at her side.

Dora Fane, Steven's senses told him, wore a bright silk and a butterfly kind of bonnet, and held a white parasol above her head. Of Katharine, all he could tell was that she looked fresher and fairer than ever in her summer dress, and that a more earnest glow than usual was on her face as she turned it and listened graciously to the handsome young rector's talk. Here was another of her slaves, he thought; the same horrible pain rising in his breast as he had felt when

he saw her with George Gordon. Peer or parson, fine London gentleman or rough-hewn yeoman, this girl brought them all alike to her feet, and smiled upon them all! He went back quickly, without turning to look at her again, the way that he had come across the churchyard; and when he got into the road found the Miss Fanes and the Squire, without the rector, about a dozen yards distant to the right.

Katharine advanced towards him with an outstretched hand. "Mr. Lawrence, surely you were not in church? I'm so glad we have met you. Dot and I only came back late last night. Papa, this is Steven Lawrence. Now, should you have recognised him?"

"Recognised him? Of course I should," cried the Squire, a stout rosy little man, with wide-open good humoured eyes and three-cornered grey whiskers, much more like a yeoman, to look at, than Steven. "The ladies talked me into believing you so altered, Lawrence, I thought I mustn't trust my own eyes when I met you, and now I see no change in you at all, except your growth. You're as like your grandfather as two peas, allowing for difference of age. How do you find the farm? A good deal run to waste, eh? Well, I gave you a

hint through Miss Dora's letter. No eye like a master's, Lawrence, you know—no eye like a master's."

Mr. Hilliard was shaking Steven's hand heartily all this time, and had really welcomed him out of the warmth of his heart; but something patronising, in his tone rather than in what he said, jarred on Katharine; more, to speak the truth, than on Steven, who was not keenly sensitive in such matters, and indeed was thinking much more of her just then than of the Squire, or of how the Squire chose his words.

"I hope the farm won't take up so much of your thoughts that you'll have no time to come to the Dene?" putting her hand as she said this within the Squire's arm. "You know you promised us in London that we should see a great deal of you!" and her fingers gave a little significant pressure which bade her stepfather give weight immediately to what she said.

"Yes, Lawrence, of course;" for, like most men, the Squire was in a state of abject subjection to Katharine. "Of course we shall expect you to be a good neighbour. Now, what's to-morrow? Monday. Well, will you come and dine with us to-morrow? Six o'clock, and no ceremony, you know:

just come as you are, and help us eat our leg of mutton, and we'll have a talk over parish matters afterwards."

Steven accepted the invitation with most unconventional readiness, and with a glow of pleasure on his handsome face; Dot having first interpolated some pleasant little insincerity of her own; and then the Squire's carriage drove up, and Katharine gave him her hand again and her smile as they drove away, and Steven was left looking after her, with a nimbus of gold cast around Clithero churchyard, and the dusty road, and every other prosaic object of this prosaic world.

"He's a good-looking lad, that," said the Squire, as they were driving home through the lanes. "If Lawrence was a gentleman, we should have a good many of the young ladies breaking their hearts about him—eh, Dot?"

"Unfortunately, he isn't a gentleman," retorted Dot, upon whose temper four-and-twenty hours of the country were already telling. "I think Lord Haverstock, in spite of his being a lord! a much better-looking man than Steven Lawrence. Yes, I am sincere. I can't get up these sylvan tastes, as Katharine can, at a moment's notice. I *cannot* appreciate men who walk about with

rough brown hands and no gloves!" and Dot threw herself back into her corner of the carriage, and sighed—thinking, no doubt, of the pretty little white hands and lavender gloves of Mr. Clarendon Whyte.

Katharine's face flushed. "I think Steven Lawrence is a gentleman, papa," she cried. "If I did not think so, I shouldn't ask him to come to our house. To my mind, he is far more refined, in his absence of all pretence, than many a man who understands every observance of what is called society, and when he comes to the Dene, I, for one, shall make him feel that I look upon him as an equal!" Here she stopped short.

"Kate," remarked the Squire, "if you want to be a friend to the young man, as no doubt you do, put all these ideas about 'gentlemen' out of your head, or at all events don't put them into his. The Lawrences are not gentlemen in any sense of the word whatever. Old Isaac Lawrence, this lad's grandfather, used just to wear a smock-frock and live with, and like his men, and I don't think Joshua Lawrence or his son took much by trying to get out of their own condition. This young Steven seems a fine, plain-spoken fellow, and I shall be glad to be a friend to him; but if you are going to turn his head with any of

your sentimental democracy, Kate, the kindest thing I could do, would be to bid him never set his foot within my doors. To go to meeting-house, associate with his equals, and work the plough with his own hands, is the way to bring round Ashcot—not playing at any new fangled nonsensical principles of equality and fraternity, with you for a play-mate, Kate.”

“You are thoroughly prejudiced, papa,” cried Katharine, hotly. “Nothing short of all our heads being cut off will convince you, as it convinced the people of France once, that opinions *are* progressing—that ridiculous distinctions of class *are* passing away, even in this blessed weald of Kent, as everywhere else in the world !”

“The difference between you two always seems to me to be this,” cried Dot, who, little burthened though she was with either sympathy or imagination, could make sharp enough hits, at times, in her judgments on better people than herself—“one plays at democracy, and is an aristocrat, heart and soul ; and the other plays at conservatism, and is a radical in practice. We’ll see, at the end of three months, who is the truest friend to our ploughman protégé, Uncle Frank, or you, Katharine !”

"We will see," said Katharine, but not without wincing in her heart at the prophecy Dot's words contained. "For you, Dot, I know very well Steven Lawrence, without kid gloves, as you say, and earning his bread with his own brown hands, can never be anything but Steven Lawrence, yeoman. You measure every coin by the stamp, not the metal!"

"Of course I do," said Dot. "So must any one with a grain of sense, I should say. Silver is silver everywhere, but a shilling won't pass current out of England, or a franc out of France, will it? It seems to me, Kate, that the stamp, not the metal, is exactly what *does* make the market value of most things!"

In saying which she spoke with the most complete and unaffected sincerity. Belief in the existence of any thing or quality, to whose value a market test would not apply, was an act of faith quite beyond the narrow reach of Dot's soul.



## CHAPTER XV.

### A STORY OF FAMILY AFFECTION.

IN the year eighteen hundred and thirty-four, more than thirty years before the date at which this story commences, two north country gentlemen, of the name of Fane, were married on the same day, at the Catholic chapel of York, to two sisters, "the young and beautiful daughters of the late Honourable John Vereker," the county newspapers recorded when announcing the wedding. There was very little money on either side: good birth and good looks being the chief portion of the brides, a commission in the army and three or four thousand pounds each the fortunes of the Fanes; and neither marriage turned out a particularly happy one. In less than a twelvemonth Geoffrey Fane, the elder brother, was forced, by extravagance and debt, to sell out of the army; went away with his young wife to the continent, and disappeared there. Ten or eleven

years later, after a great deal of poverty and discontent, Richard, the younger one, died suddenly, leaving his widow to subsist, with her two children, upon her scanty pension and the interest of such money as the recent purchase of his majority had left out of her husband's capital.

Mrs. Richard Fane was a very pretty woman still at the time of her bereavement: one of those pink-and-white angelic women with beseeching eyes, mild ill-health, and fragile, dimpled, helpless hands, so well suited to enact the rôle of inconsolable widowhood, and so certain not to enact it overlong! Before Richard Fane had been eighteen months dead, the Squire of Clithero, walking about on the Scarborough beach, fell in love with this tender creature—still in weeds and a fair little daughter on either side—and, at the expiration of the conventional two years, Mrs. Fane had, to use her own words, “secured a home and protector for her Richard's children” by becoming Mr. Hilliard's wife.

Whether Mr. Hilliard had secured his own happiness by marrying her was a problem from attempting whose solution he himself sedulously shrank to his life's end. As his wife's suffering state of health and beseeching,

ill-used expression of face continued the same, she was ever, traditionally, to him a kind of domestic angel upon whom this lower world bore too hard, and whose thorny path it was his duty to smooth through submission to all those little unevennesses of mood by which angels, in domestic life, are beset. "She gave up all for me!" the poor Squire would say, with tears in his eyes, when any intimate friend got him on the subject of his household troubles; "her determination of never marrying again, the name that I know now was dearer than life itself to her heart, her religion—all! I should be a brute, by ——! a brute, if I didn't bear her poor little infirmities with patience. What should I have been, sir, if I had not met with that woman? That's what I ask myself."

A much happier man, would probably have been the true answer; but such a heresy never even crossed the Squire's imagination. He was one of those commonplace men, who, with silent heroism, will bear the tyranny of a weak and selfish woman throughout their lifetime, and in their inmost hearts for ever upbraid themselves that they have not bowed their necks sufficiently low beneath the yoke! His wife's bodily feebleness, her incapacity, real or alleged, of getting into

the open air except during the hottest summer weather, her querulousness, her want of reason, all appealed to the Squire's kindly heart, much as a baby's weakness appeals to a patient nurse. And then—yes, even at this present time, when they were both of them nearer fifty than any other age—he continued not a little in love with her still. She was so delicate and fragile, so foolish, so girlishly fond of dress and attention, even in her advanced middle-age, that the Squire never could realise to himself that his wife was already an old woman, and loved her, as I think rougher, more sterling wives at forty-eight are seldom loved. “No man will ever care for me as papa does for you, mother,” Katharine would say; “I’m too strong, and large, and well able to take care of myself, ever to be made an idol of!” And Mrs. Hilliard, with a little sigh, would take the remark quite as a matter of course: then bid her daughter be thankful that she was as she was. Excessive beauty, excessive attraction, did not bring happiness to their possessors, “or why should I, Kate, have had your dear, dear father, and my rank in life, and religion, and everything else, taken from me, and now spend the life of suffering that I do?” That she had been very discon-

tented in the poverty of her first marriage, and was extremely comfortable in the luxury of her second one, were the facts of the case; but Mrs. Hilliard lived in a sentimental ideal world—with a population of one—from whence facts were rigorously excluded. And even Katharine, with all her stout common sense, could never, in her childish days at least, feel sure that her pleasant home at the Dene, and her garden, and her pony, and the Squire's affection, were not good things that had been purchased for her at the terrible price of her mother's martyrdom.

Dora's appearance on the scene did not occur until about a year and a half after Mrs. Hilliard's second marriage. Up to this time the Squire had always believed his wife to be an only daughter, and it was by purest accident, and from an alien source, that he abruptly discovered at last that there had been another sister, married also to a Fane, and the mother of one child. On cross-examination, Mrs. Hilliard confessed that she had been accustomed to write to the Geoffrey Fanes during the early years of her first marriage, but that, somehow or another, the correspondence had been allowed latterly to drop. In the last letter she ever received


from them, more than seven years ago, Geoffrey himself was said to be dying in Paris; his wife in failing health; and every shilling of their money spent. "And I sent them twenty pounds, Mr. Hilliard," she added, "little as my Richard and I could afford it, and for *your* sake, and to spare *your* feelings, have never spoken of poor dear Theodosia since I married you."

"And the child?" cried the Squire, looking for once with indignation, bordering on disgust, at his wife's calm pink-and-white face. "Eight and seven—God bless my soul! if the girl lives she must be fifteen. What will have become of her in these years, if both of her parents are dead?"

Mrs. Hilliard answered hysterically, that she was sure she didn't know; and it was very cruel, in her weak state, to call up such dreadful images of her own flesh and blood. If Mr. Hilliard had the slightest delicacy of feeling, he would know what it must cost any one of her sensitive nature to imagine, even, that a sister or a sister's child could want! If she had thought such bitter things would have been said, she was sure she never would have mentioned her poor Theodosia's name to him at all:—then to her room and sal-volatile.

The next morning the Squire packed up his portmanteau, and started off alone to Dover, speculating, somewhat, on the journey as to whether sainted invalids have much feeling for aught besides themselves or not. He had a good deal of work to do in Paris before he could find the faintest clue to Geoffrey Fane or his family; but English gold, liberally spent, and assistance from the police, brought him, after four days, on the right track. Geoffrey Fane died on a fifth floor in the Boulevard de l'Hôpital about seven years ago; his wife had only survived him by a twelvemonth; and his child was, or had been till lately, the apprentice of a woman living Rue Mouffetard, 57, and fripière-modiste (half pawnbroker, half milliner, that is to say) by trade.

With forebodings of he knew not what: with a heavier sense of shame than any that in his whole upright life he had known before, the Squire took a fiacre, within five minutes after receiving tidings of his wife's niece, and drove, through quarters of Paris into which the "walks" of Galignani had never brought him before, to the Rue Mouffetard—the principal street of that singular twelfth arrondissement which borders the Bièvre, and where washing, bleaching, and



tanning are the exclusive occupations of the community. He stopped, as he had been directed, at Number 57, and discharged the fiacre. "Madame Mauprat?" said a little old woman, who was tottering under a hideous pyramid of untanned skins into the courtyard; the Squire having three times repeated the name before his English pronunciation rendered it intelligible. "Yes, yes. Madame Mauprat lived on the entresol, of course. Par là, mon petit Monsieur, montez, montez!" So the Squire groped his way to a dirty, very nearly dark staircase; mounted; and on the stage of the entresol rang a bell, which he guessed, for it was too dark to read if any name was written there, might belong to Madame Mauprat.

It was answered by a child apparently of about eleven years old; a thin, dark-eyed child, exquisitely neat, in an old black alpaca frock, with gilt earrings in her ears, a ring on her hand, fair hair taken back à la Chinoise from her face, and a little cap on the back of her head. She gave him a curtsy and a smile; the Squire caught an expression like little Kate's at home about her lips, and his heart beat thick.

"What is your name, my dear?" he said,



in English. "Don't be afraid; I've come here to be your friend."

The child made him another curtsy, or rather another series of bows and smiles and curtsies, and begged him, in French, to give himself the trouble to enter. "Anglais, no—var leetle!" she added, turning round, and looking like Kate again as the Squire followed her into a little shop, with caps and bonnets on a tiny round table and a rose-tree and bird-cage in the apology for a window. "Donnez vous la peine de vous asseoir M'sieur. La patronne va rentrer tout de suite—de tree minute—M'sieur comprends?"

So the poor Squire found himself thrown upon his French, entirely composed of substantives—"oui," "nong," and "avez-vous"—and in this language proceeded to ask her questions. "Avez-vous père and mère? Anglais? Mort? Argent? Beef and Moutong?" assisting his little hearer's comprehension of each question by such pantomimic show of taking out a gold piece and holding it to her, pretending to eat and drink, et cetera, as seemed to him best suited to her tender years and capacity.

With thorough self-possession, and with more and more smiles: for his gold watch-chain and gold pieces, and the nation to which

he belonged, were facts perfectly intelligible to her, whatever his French was : the child stood before him and gave her answers. Her father and mother were dead, more years ago than she could tell. They were English, both of them, and had died here in Paris. She had lived with the patronne ever since. Money ? Eh, mon dieu, M'sieur—with a shrug of her small shoulders—not too much of that. And beef and mutton ? Yes, on a Sunday, sometimes. And amusement—pleasure ? . . . Ah, M'sieur would say distractions ! Oh, for that—yes ! There were the balls of the Barreaux Verts, and the concerts at the Petit Bicêtre ; and once she had been to Asnières ; and once—with conscious pride this—to Mabille ! M'sieur was English ? M'sieur did not inhabit Paris ?—looking at him with pity. Ah ! M'sieur would not be acquainted, then, with the places where she found her distractions, even if she were to name them.

The Squire looked at the little creature, as she babbled on, with a pity for which I can find no name. He was not at all a philosopher. It would never have occurred to him that the life of a milliner's apprentice in one of the poorest quarters of Paris : making up caps of six sous each, and dancing among the washing-girls at the Sunday balls : might be

a life out of which some human creatures could get a good deal of enjoyment. For a girl of English birth, the daughter of an English gentleman, the cousin of little Kate at home, to have spent her childhood among vile, immoral French people (everything not English was vile and immoral to the Squire), was desecration that made his blood boil as he thought of it. And when the "patronne" herself entered, some minutes later, nothing but the impossibility of being abusive without adjectives withheld him from giving his opinion of her, and of the rest of her countrywomen, on the spot.

Madame Mauprat was a stout, well-featured woman of about fifty, Norman, not Parisian, by birth, and with something of country frankness still discernible in her speech and manner. Monsieur's business? Ah, ha! Monsieur wished information about the little Bébé. And how was she to tell then—no offence—that Monsieur's intentions were frank, and that it would be her duty to answer him?

"Argent," answered the Squire, laconically. "Argent Anglais," chinking the money in his pockets. "Vous parly, and I pay."

In all his continental travels, experience

had taught him that this was a short but infallible road to the foreign conscience; and Madame Mauprat proved no exception to the general rule. Her quick Norman instinct for scenting a bargain made her grasp in a second every detail of the situation. The Bébé's English relatives had found her out at last, and wanted to purchase her. Now the thing was to raise the value of the article in demand to the uttermost. She put her arm round Bébé's shoulder—the girl opening great eyes at such a demonstration—drew her to her side; and without more than the necessary arabesque of falsehood, told her story. In 1841, Madame Mauprat had had a lodging in a house on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital, a poor fifth floor, of which an Englishman with his wife and child shared half. The man died; and the widow with such money as she possessed, a miserable five hundred francs! entered into business as modiste—fripière-modiste, Madame Mauprat pretended to be no higher in the world than she was—with her neighbour. "And a bad bargain was struck for me that day, Monsieur," added the woman, shaking her head at the recollection. Madame Veine—that was the English lady's name? the Squire nodded; could neither work nor

mind the business; could do nothing, in short, but to take to her bed and weep. Monsieur might figure to himself how prettily a long illness would eat up the profits of a poor little commerce like hers! Well, at the end of a year, Madame Veine died, leaving her to pay the expenses of the doctor and the funeral, and with this fillette that Monsieur saw—this Béb  on her hands! What to do? The child was an expense and no profit; too small to work—look at her now, fifteen years old, and a little doll, an atom, a B b  as she was! but what will you? Madame Mauprat had the heart of a mother, and couldn't give her up as her friends advised, to the police. Since that time B b  had eaten of her bread, and shared her room, and been to her as her own child. And Mauprat raised a corner of her shawl to her eyes, and wept.

“Combieng?” said the Squire, with a face of parchment.

“Monsieur!” sobbed the Frenchwoman.

“Combieng,” repeated Mr. Hilliard. “Le petit fill pour moi. Combieng?”

Madame Mauprat became indignant; the Squire spoke of the police; finally, the child herself was appealed to. She put a little thin hand at once into her new protector's, and said that she would go with him; and

after this the "patronne" had nothing to do but make as good a money bargain for herself as possible. The Squire paid down his English gold with royal liberality. "After all," said he to himself, "the woman may have saved the child from the foundling hospital;" and in half an hour's time Bébé, or rather Dora Fane, was seated by his side in a fiacre, and driving with him through the tortuous streets of the Faubourg St. Marceau towards the distant Rue de Rivoli, where he lodged. There was no doubt whatever as to the child's identity. The Geoffrey Fanes had lived in Paris at the time of her birth: and her certificate of baptism, a few old letters, and a note-book of her father's, had all been sold, one by one, by Mauprat to the Squire. This little work-girl, in her white cap, and with her ideas and manners of the twelfth arrondissement, was the treasure that he had brought up from the lowest social strata of Parisian life to be the acknowledged niece of his high-bred wife, the daily companion of Bella and little Kate at home.

The poor Squire was simply and literally too much afraid of his own work to take the child back to England at once; so wrote a preparatory letter to Mrs. Hilliard first; then spent two or three days in Paris alone

with little Dora. Before they had been six hours together a great deal of the child's English, disused rather than forgotten, began to return to her, and coming to the help of the Squire's French, enabled them to understand each other admirably—under no circumstances, perhaps, would a man with a heart like Mr. Hilliard's, and a pocket full of money, find it very hard to make a child understand him! The first thing to be done, he thought, after returning to the hotel, ordering a room for her, and writing his English letter, was to give her some beef and mutton. So taking her hand, he walked her off to the Palais Royal—it was about five o'clock of a summer's afternoon—and ordered a dinner at the restaurant of the Trois Frères. A dinner suited to Ma'mselle, he told the waiter; plain roast meat, and plenty of sweets and fruits, and all the things a child of her age would like. You may believe how Dora, who had never tasted anything more dainty than galette and cherry compote in her life, and who had only eaten a plate of water-soup that day, enjoyed herself. The roast meat she would not look at; but vegetables, hors-d'œuvres of all sorts, marrons-glacés, ices, creams—all of these the little famished creature ate greedily, and at last,

when she could absolutely do no more in the way of present consumption, waited till the garçon, who was serving their table had turned his back, then plunged both her hands into a dish of candied fruits, and began briskly to fill her pockets, with a face and air of quiet unconcern that tickled the Squire's fancy immensely.

This was Dora's first experience of the sweetness of riches. When they had left the restaurant they walked, hand in hand, about the colonnades; the Squire quite unconscious of the singular discrepancy in their appearance, and the smiles and remarks that were freely bestowed on them by the crowd; and after a time the child was told that she might buy any little trinket she liked for her own. She was modest as yet; could not, in fact, realise the enormous wealth of her new protector; so walked him up to an open stall, where "Imitation" was written in black and yellow letters a foot long, and chose a pinchbeck locket of three francs. Next morning she proposed a visit to the Palais Royal again; stopped before a window "en Or," got the Squire inside, and was seized with violent admiration for a tiny doll's watch of one hundred and forty francs. Mr. Hilliard gave it her; and then there must be a chain to



hang it from ; and then there was a brooch, and a ring—" Ah, but a ring, m'sieur, that would go so well on my small finger !" And then the Squire, beginning to see of what materials his new-found treasure was made, got out of the shop and out of the Palais Royal as quick as his legs would carry him.

This was on Saturday : they were to leave Paris early on Monday morning ; and Dora conveyed to her friend, her uncle, as she already called him, that it would be proper for her to have some new clothes, a pretty dress, and a jacket, and a bonnet—how her heart throbbed at the thought ! above all, a bonnet to appear in on Sunday. These, of course, were matters respecting which the Squire was powerless in the child's hands. " Not too dear," was all he said, as they stopped at the different shops on the Boulevard ; and " not too de-are !" Dora always replied, with a wise shake of her head ; then went in and bought exactly what dress, bonnet, gloves, and parasol suited her fancy.

On Sunday afternoon it must really have been a picture to see the two sally forth for a walk in the Champs Elysées. The portly little Squire with his English frock-coat and light waistcoat, and close-shorn English face,

Dora in a silk robe, worn long to the ground for the first time in her life, cream-coloured gloves, white parasol, tiny pink bonnet, and the airs and graces of a Parisienne of thirty ! She walked along in a sort of ecstasy, barely feeling that her feet trod on solid earth through the Champs Elysées, and just as they were reaching the Bois de Boulogne her cup of joy was filled to the last drop of overflowing : two of the washing-girls of her old quartier walking with their sweethearts in blouses, passed ; then turned round and gazed at her ! She looked with sublime unconcern at the string of carriages in the road, as though all acquaintances of hers must be *there*, not in the footpath, and realised how utterly she had done with her old life and all the people belonging to it. It seemed a hundred years since Thursday night, when these very girls, out of their scanty savings, had given her a ticket, and taken her with them to the gallery of the Ambigu. How delicious to think that they would go home and tell Hortense and Delphine and the rest that they had seen the little Bébé in a silk robe and a bonnet, and walking with a gentleman, and too grand—oh, much too grand and fine a lady to speak to *them* !

After their walk they had dinner at one of the summer restaurants of the Bois de Boulogne, and as they were sitting at dessert the Squire asked the child what she would like to do to finish the day? He knew that a girl of her age, brought up in Paris, would have no idea of Sunday save as a day of amusement; "and if I never commit a greater sin," thought he, "than letting her have a boat on the lake or a ride in a merry-go-round on her last day in Paris, my conscience will be a white one!" And so he put the question to her.

"Amusement? somezing give me plaizir?" said Dora, repeating his words after him. "Ah, que, m'sieur, est bon! We will go——" Her heart cried to one of the balls of the Barreaux Verts, to look on, too grand to dance (except perhaps with young Oliver, the butcher of the faubourg), and eclipsing Hortense and Delphine, and the whole world she knew, with her dress and her watch, and her general aristocracy of appearance. This was her first impulse; then she looked wistfully at the Squire, shook her head with an instinctive feeling that a ball in the twelfth arrondissement would not perhaps be quite the place for him, and said boldly, "To Mabilles!"

The Squire jumped up from his chair with horror.

“Mais, mon dieu, nous sommes très très bien !” cried Dora, thinking he might be too modest, perhaps, to present himself in such high society. “Zay refuse—no ! zay admit us—yes !”

“Admit us !” said the Squire ; “yes, I suppose they would ! Me at Mabilles—on a Sunday ! Come away, come away, child !” And Dora was walked back to the hotel ; and after a long sermon from the Squire, went to her bed that night with a sense of a new wide gulf between her and him, and a dim idea that she had better never tell the truth on any subject whatsoever as soon as she found herself among her rich relations in England.

Stunted in her moral as in her physical growth, the poor little creature had really, up to the age of fifteen, continued shielded, by her very incapacity, from the knowledge of evil as of good. A robust, more loving nature would probably in these early years have contracted far more positive harm than had Dora’s. She had liked going to the balls of the barrière, not for any notice that was ever taken there of her own meagre little face, but for the sake of looking at the

toilettes, most of them furnished by her own patronne, of the washing-girls; or of sitting in a corner apart from the crowd, with some other child of her own size, and "making believe" that they were grand ladies in long silk dresses, with a carriage and livery servants to conduct them home. Had liked standing tiptoes in the galleries of the cheap theatres, when any one would treat her to a place there, not, as more highly-endowed children of her age will do, dreaming premature dreams of love or romance, and seeing herself in the beautiful princess, or weeping Aventurine, with Prince Charming, and all the other handsome lovers at her feet! Love and romance were things of which not the faintest whisper had entered the child's prosaic life. At the balls of the *barrière* she had amused herself with admiring the poor bits of finery of the washing-girls. At the theatre her pleasure had consisted in watching the dresses of the actresses, or of the ladies far down below in their boxes; wondering what they could have cost; speculating how she one day would dress if any turn of luck, such as befalls poor orphan girls, on the stage, should find her with full pockets! Dress to this little child of Paris was the sum of human existence: theatres


and balls, and the Boulevards on a Sunday were places to show it in ; and every effort, every sacrifice of life, means wherewith to buy it. She had never seen very much of virtue ; she had never heard anything at all of vice. Some ladies had to wear high-up cotton dresses ; and others—on the stage, and in the lower boxes—were in such a state of beatitude as to possess shining silks, and necklaces, and to show their bare shoulders. She hoped when she was a woman she would be like these latter ones ; and not, at all events, marry a working-man, a tanner, or rag-collector, as she had known some of her friends do, and live for ever in a miserable room, with dirty children, and kicks from her husband's sabots whenever she tried to go abroad for her pleasure ! This was about the extent of Dora's social generalizations. The Squire, too simple of heart, too narrow of mind to have any, save the most literal black-and-white ideas of right, had been absolutely staggered, thrown out of all his bearings of morality, by the girl's unblushing proposal of Mabile on the Sabbath ; and so at once laid the foundation of her whole future deterioration of character—hypocrisy !

“ Say as little as you possibly can about Paris, my poor child,” was the burthen of all

his advice to her during their journey home. "Your aunt is a very pious woman, and your cousins must never hear the name of—of such places as you mentioned on Sunday!"

And the child, nodding her small head, and looking wise, told him always he need not fear. "Bals de la barrière—no! Theatres, no! Mabilles—no, no, no!" The climax with a burst of virtuous warmth highly satisfactory to the Squire in this his first attempt at moral training.

The five minutes succeeding the arrival of the travellers at the Dene were minutes never to fade from Dora's recollection while she lived. The poor little girl had not been used to much kindness! of love she knew not the meaning; but she had been accustomed, at least, to the bonhommie of manner which French people, of all classes and professions, show towards children; and when the companionship of the kindly Squire was suddenly exchanged for the presence of Mrs. Hilliard and her eldest daughter, whatever heart there was in the child's small breast froze up at once, and as far as they were concerned, for ever. Mrs. Hilliard, unapproachably stately in her soft laces, and invalid shawl, and easy chair, just touched her niece's cheek with her lips, then remarked—with a look at the



Squire, that made him feel himself an impostor, and Dot the result of some iniquitous conspiracy—that the child was not in the least like either of her parents, and put her handkerchief over her eyes. Arabella, a tall womanly girl of her age, shook her cousin's hand coldly; looked at her from head to foot; then, turning to her stepfather, asked him what sort of bonnets were worn in Paris?

“Bonnets? why, such as you see on Dora, of course,” said the Squire, putting his arm kindly round the stranger's thin shoulders. “When Dora and I walked out on Sunday, we thought ourselves the two best-dressed people in the Changs Elysy, didn't we, Dora? Where's Kate?” ringing the bell. “I want Kate to come and give a kiss to her Paris cousin.”

And then the door opened, and whatever brightness, whatever love Dora Fane's life was destined to know, came in.

Katharine was at this time a fine-grown handsome child of eight, nearly as tall as Dora, more than her equal in weight, and with a baby's innocence upon her beautiful mouth and in her eyes. She rushed up to the Squire, covered his down-bent face with kisses, then turned and looked steadily at her new cousin. She had been told of a girl



the same age as Arabella; and to a little child of eight a girl of fifteen is a woman; so seeing a creature of her own height, but in a long silk dress and with an old unsmiling face, she shrank back, and caught tight hold of her stepfather's hand.

"Why—what a dot!" she cried; honestly, but not in a complimentary voice.

"Kate," said the Squire, gravely, "this child has neither father nor mother, nor friend save us. Will you love her?"

Katharine stood irresolute for a second; then the forlorn new cousin tried to smile—holding out her hand, and looking frightened—and in another moment a pair of warm white arms were round her neck. "I do love you!" cried Katharine; "and I'm glad you're so small. You shall be my friend, not Bell's. Don't think you've no one to care for you, though you are such a dot—you'll have me!"

This was how from the first Dora came to be called "Dot;" and this, as I have said, was the beginning of the solitary affection destined ever to shine upon the little creature's life.

In a week Kate had made the Squire give Dot a garden of her own, and a fishing-rod, and a setter pup; possessions, the child thought, to raise any human creature to the

highest pinnacle of happiness. In a week the pink Paris bonnet and white parasol were unceremoniously appropriated by Arabella, the beautiful silk dress confiscated by Mrs. Hilliard's orders ; and the little work-girl of the Faubourg Saint Marceau, with bitterest disappointment, had begun to realise what kind of life this was to which her fate had brought her.

She hated it with a hate that every year of her life only tended to strengthen. Not alone the city habits of her childhood, but her naturally weak and fragile organization, withheld her from ever entering with pleasure upon the hardy out-of-door life of little Kate and the Squire. She could not learn to ride ; she hated fishing, got sick and tired before she had walked through half a turnip-field. All the excitement, all the healthy animal enjoyment of country life was, perforce, a sealed book to her ; and as nearly the whole of Kate's afternoons, winter and summer, were spent outside the house, long and dreary were the hours in which Dora had to sit at her needle by herself and dream of the old life—sweet in spite of its hard work and privations—from which she had been taken. She never, from the day on which she entered the Squire's house until she finally left it in

white silk and orange blossoms, had one act of positive unkindness to complain of. Mrs. Hilliard, from the first, looked upon the unexpected discovery of her pauper niece as "her cross," and treated the girl always with outward consideration, yet with a smothered kind of meek malignity that Dot was quite sharp enough to feel and return with compound interest. The eldest Miss Fane simply ignored her. "I never knew my poor aunt Theodosia," she would say, "and of course I cannot be expected to feel much interest in her daughter. It was very good of dear papa to act as he did; and I'm sure I hope, in time, poor Dora will settle respectably. It will be no advantage to Kate, having a girl of her disposition for a companion in the house as she grows up." And so, between the mother and daughter, Dora in these first years came to occupy a place higher than the lady's maid, certainly, because she dined at table, but more fatally dull, more bereft of anything like healthy human interest in life than that of the lowest servant in the Squire's household.

These were the days of her early flirtation with Steven—these were the days of young Hoskins, the surgeon, and of Mr. Smith, the curate. Detesting the country, detesting

her life at home, shut out by natural incapacity from study of anything deeper than the fashion-books, what was Dot, now eighteen years of age, to do but make up little bits of furtive finery in her own room, and try their effects on the different young men of the neighbourhood whenever she had a chance of meeting them in her walks? Arabella Fane, on the eve of marrying old General Dering's three thousand a year, solemnly warned the girl once about the growing and deplorable frivolity of her character; and Dot's retort established for life the dislike that had only smouldered hitherto between herself and her cousin. "I don't pretend to be anything but frivolous," she said. "I have, as you say, no interests, no serious occupations; and then, Arabella, you know, you have given me no opportunity of meeting rich old generals! If I had had the chance—va! do you think I would not have sacrificed inclination to principle just as readily as you, my cousin?"

She had no chance of meeting rich old generals; and somehow, in spite of the Squire's declared intention of giving her a thousand pounds on her wedding-day, none of the young men in the neighbourhood seemed destined to do more than flirt with

Dora. Steven Lawrence ran away to California; Mr. Smith went over to Rome; young Hoskins got into a dispensary practice and married his cousin at Dorking; and Dora Fane was Dora Fane still. She grew up, as much as she was destined ever to grow: began to feel old, began to look old: and still no prospect dawned of her leaving her prison-house, as in her heart she always called the Dene. Then came Katharine's eighteenth birthday, her introduction into the world, her brilliant first season in London; finally, her engagement to Lord Petres, and all poor Dora's colourless, hopeless life was changed.

"If people want to be civil to me, they shall be civil to Dot," Katharine would say, stoutly. "If Bella wants me to stay with her, she shall ask Dot too. We have forgotten too long, I think, all of us, that the poor little thing may have a few vanities, a few desires for amusement in life, like ourselves!"

And Mrs. Dering, too good a woman to be uncharitable when the wishes of an embryo peeress were concerned, had not only invited Dora to her house, but in a certain cold and duty-like fashion had done what she could towards assisting the first start of her penniless cousin in the world of London. A pre-

sent of three silk dresses, in whatever colour the penniless cousin chose, but not costing more than six shillings and sixpence a yard; an introduction to the least valuable of her own partners: and a set of garnet ornaments: with all these benefactions (in addition to the attic up among the servants in Hertford Street) had Mrs. Dering loaded Dora; bearing, as she said, no malice respecting things past, in her heart.

“And so, whatever the future brings, Kate,” she would reflect, “we shall always have the satisfaction of knowing that we have performed our duty. Principles, right feeling, no human creature can instil into another; but as much as it is permitted us to do, our family has done for Dora. Now, if we could only help her into making a suitable marriage!”

Which remark brings me back, with nice precision, to the present point of my story. To render Dora Fane’s character intelligible, I have been forced, thus far, to digress. All that concerns her for the future will be written on the same blotted page that bears the record of poor Steven’s life!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SQUIRE BECOMES SHARP-SIGHTED.

“YES, these things bring history home to ourselves,” said Mrs. Hilliard, shutting up her third volume. “I realize as I never did before, what the poor dear French noblesse must have gone through—their property confiscated, not knowing from day to day whether their heads were safe on their shoulders, and with morality, religion, the very days of the week, you may say, turned upside down by paganism and the republic . . . just as England is being turned upside down by these strikes and monster meetings and democratic opinions now! You may laugh, Katharine, but it is so; and having the lower classes to one’s table is a tremendous stride—a tremendous stride,” repeated Mrs. Hilliard, with more energy than correctness of metaphor, “against every principle in which one was reared. To dance at a ball with tenantry,

or even the men-servants, is nothing—Dossy and I used to do it (in high dresses, of course), every Christmas, in my father's house; but dinner—a man of this Steven Lawrence's condition to dinner!"


Too really weak in health for any active employment in life, and with a mental digestion too torpid, or too vitiated, for the assimilation of any robust nourishment, Mrs. Hilliard consumed the ordinary three volume novel to a simply incalculable extent. "Passed her life in the pursuit of literature," she was accustomed to say of herself. And her ideas—if I may call them ideas—were apt to take whatever feeble colouring they possessed from the tone of the nine hundred pages which her fingers had been turning over between breakfast and dinner. The hero and heroine of to-day, happening to have lost their heads on the scaffold in '92, poor Mrs. Hilliard was all in a flutter of indignant agitation at the idea of this *sans culotte*—this son of the people, Steven Lawrence—being asked to dine at her table. She had put a quantity of rich old lace about her handsome shoulders, had braided her soft hair plainly from her forehead—as the dear Marquise de Videcœur, the heroine's mother, did on the morning when her ruffi-



anly executioners bore her to the scaffold—and now sat on her luxurious invalid sofa before the fire, waiting for her six o'clock dinner with quiet resignation, and feeling how like one of the beautiful martyred patricians of the Revolution she must look.

Katharine came from the open window where she had been standing, a book in her hand, but her eyes fixed in reality upon the distant road which led from Ashcot to the Dene, and knelt down by her mother's side. "Dear mamma," kissing Mrs. Hilliard's delicate hand, "how romantic you always insist upon being about everything! Steven Lawrence is going to dine here, and talk to papa about mangels and second crops, and the injustice of dissenters paying church rates, and you build up a whole revolutionary romance—the guillotine in full force on the necks of dukes and duchesses, and Steven Lawrence for their headsman—on the spot! Confess, mamma, you have been reading some story to-day about the French Revolution? Now, I know you have!"

"Katharine," said Mrs. Hilliard, giving her third volume a little unseen push beneath the sofa cushion, "when I was a girl it was the fashion to store young women's minds—to *store* them, Kate—with sound fixed ideas



on all subjects ; moral, religious, and political. There is no need of the flimsy literature of the day to rub up my memory in history. I know the French Revolution as well as my catechism : Robespierre, Danton, the Marquise de Videcœur—no, I'm not sure whether she *was* historical, but at all events, Kate, I know perfectly well what I am talking of."

"Of course you do, dear mamma, as far as history goes ; only, why apply it all to Steven Lawrence ? He is very humble, poor fellow—we saw a little of him in London, you know—does not in the least try to set himself above what he is, and . . . oh, mamma !" cried Katharine, "be nice to him, as you, and you only, can be when you choose !"

"And why, Katharine, pray ?" for her recollections of the French Revolution were not so vivid as to have dislodged from Mrs. Hilliard's mind the story of modern English life she read yesterday, in which a simple young country lady had married, then murdered her head-gardener. "Why are *you* so anxious about the reception this Steven Lawrence is to receive ?"

"In the first place, because he is to be our guest, mamma. In the second, because

—well, because he will be, ever so little, perhaps, out of his place.”

“Anything more, Kate?”

“No, that is—mother!” cried Katharine, suddenly, looking up into Mrs. Hilliard’s rose-and-white foolish face: “I wonder whether I can trust you with a secret of mine?”

Mrs. Hilliard raised one white hand to her forehead. “Please go on, Katharine. I *believe* I can bear anything. Tell me all—and quick!” said the poor lady, falling back upon one of the favourite phrases of her heroines: “Anything but suspense!”

“Oh, don’t expect too much, mamma. It’s all very silly, I believe—an idea Bella and I have taken up; but we think . . . well, we think Steven Lawrence may have intentions about Dot, and that, perhaps, everything considered, we ought to try to help matters on.”

“Intentions! about Dot!” cried Mrs. Hilliard, opening her eyes wide in a moment. “What! of marrying her? Oh, dear me! and her grandfather a Vereker, and her birth equal to yours and Bella’s!—it must be, of course, for we are all married brothers and sisters—no, I don’t mean that—but you have told me so suddenly, Kate, my mind is quite upset. However, I’ll not go in to

dinner! *That* humiliation, at least, it is in my power to save myself. My sister's orphan girl—oh, Dossy, Dossy!"

"Mamma," said Katharine, not without impatience, "if Dossy—if my aunt Theodosia—were alive, I don't think she would be disgraced by seeing Dot married to a man like Steven Lawrence. Dot is not quite so young as she once was, and—well, I don't mind saying it between you and me—poor little Dot has not had many offers of marriage, and I don't think has enough resources in herself to be happy as a single woman. If Mr. Lawrence really should care for her, mamma, I think you will be acting very unwisely, indeed, to discourage him."

"I discourage him!" cried Mrs. Hilliard. "Oh, Kate, how like Mr. Hilliard you are when you argue! what different, what generous tempers I was accustomed to once! I discourage Dora's suitors, when for fifteen years I have worn myself out with the poor girl's infirmities and—and the efforts I have made to be a mother to her! No man with a spark of delicate feeling," said Mrs. Hilliard, with tears rising in her meek blue eyes, "no man with the faintest delicacy or consideration for his wife's happiness would have acted as Mr. Hilliard did in

first bringing her here! But, of course, when a wife has once made such sacrifices as I did for her husband—and a second husband, too! he will never know where to stop in his demands. I don't suppose another woman in this county would have behaved as I did when Mr. Hilliard first brought Dora from Paris. A pink silk bonnet and white parasol—of course, you are too young to remember—and the religious principles of a Hottentot, to associate with my Richard's children!"

"Dear mamma, what harm did she do us?" said Katharine; too much accustomed to her mother's peculiar modes of logic to attempt to argue. "From the time she entered the house till now Dot seems to me to have been simply and entirely negative. A poor little creature, not very much pleasure, perhaps, to herself or to any one else, but harmless, thoroughly."

"Of course, Kate. That is just what Mr. Hilliard says. It's very easy for those who are in strong health, and who spend their lives out of doors, to use such words as 'harmless' and 'negative.' To an invalid nothing can be negative. If people are not sympathetic to me they are positively repulsive; and Dora is not sympathetic.

Dora is anything but sympathetic, Kate, as you know. I detest frivolity."

"I know that as a rule all the people you like are worthy of being liked," replied Katharine, diplomatically, "and this makes me feel you will be pleased with Steven Lawrence. He is bright and simple-hearted, mamma; quite diffident of himself, and full of fine natural good feeling; so putting aside all this about Dot—which of course is mere foolish talk of mine—you *will* be gracious to the poor fellow when he comes, won't you?"

"Have you ever known me anything but gracious to persons of a lower rank to our own, Katharine?" said Mrs. Hilliard, reverting once more to the tone of the Marquise de Videcœur. "It may give me pain, infinite pain, to feel that Mr. Hilliard should have placed me in such a false position, but I shall treat the young man himself precisely as I would treat Lord Haverstock at my own table. *Noblesse oblige*, Kate!"

So when, a quarter of an hour later, Steven Lawrence entered, he received a softly courteous greeting, a kindly smile from Katharine's mother that almost made him as much her slave as he already was her daughter's! The excessive feminine sweet-

ness of the elder lady's face ; her weakness, her pallor, her slow, languid voice, her white languid hands, all redoubled in Steven's heart the sense that Katharine Fane had newly taught him of perfect refinement, of perfect womanly grace. As a boy he remembered having occasional glimpses of the "Squire's lady," fair and languid-voiced and helpless, then as now ; and the thought of all the patient suffering which this gentle being must have passed through since, appealed to him as the thought of pain and weakness in others is wont to appeal to men of unbroken health and active out-of-door habits themselves. With the Squire talking to him, and Dot going through pretty attitudes with the paroquet by the window (for his benefit) ; nay, with Katharine herself at his side, he could not keep his attention from the invalid's fragile face ; and when dinner was announced, quite unconscious of what was, or was not, etiquette for a man in his position to do, walked quickly to her sofa, and stooping down, held out his arm for her hand to rest upon as she rose.

"That is right, Lawrence," said the Squire. "Do you take in Mrs. Hilliard, and Dora, you must be content with me. I'm sorry for

you, Kate," as Katharine, her face radiant at seeing her mother's gracious reception of Steven, put her hand under his other arm ; "but even Kate Fane must come down from her pedestal sometimes ! If I had thought of it I might have asked the handsome young rector for you, though—poor Kate !"

"I'm very glad you did not, papa," said Katharine. "We are a much pleasanter party by ourselves, in my opinion !" And Steven's heart caught her answer, and thrilled with a perfectly unwarrantable and ridiculous sense of relief ! He had been lying awake half the night thinking, in jealous misery, of the handsome rector, and of how Katharine had smiled on him as they walked together out of church.

"You will find us all very much changed, Mr. Lawrence," said Mrs. Hilliard, as leaning on Steven's arm, she walked slowly with him to the dining-room. "The children grown into women, the Squire and I, alas ! into old people."

"Old ?" said Steven, looking down at her with his frank blue eyes. "That's not a word I should have thought of in connection with you. I may be stupid, but it seems to me, madam, yours is a face that never could grow old."



Here he stopped ; afraid he had been overbold ; and Mrs. Hilliard remembered Ninon de l'Enclos, for whose smiles a third generation duelled when she was sixty, and let her soft white hand rest closer on the young man's arm.

She bade him sit beside her at table : Katharine opposite to him ; and speedily forgetting the wounded pride of Videcœur in the flattered vanity of Ninon, chattered in her prettiest, most sentimental strain (a strain that thirty years before had, doubtless, suited a girlish peach-blossom face well enough) during the whole of dinner. "We were to have talked over parish matters, I believe, Lawrence," said Mr. Hilliard, when the dessert was put upon the table, and they had moved away into the bay window ; for in spring-time the dining-room was the pleasantest evening-room at the Dene, and the ladies always stayed there while the Squire drank his coffee after dinner ; "but I have not been able to get in a word with you yet. How do you find the farm looking ? not quite as it used in the old days, I suppose."

"The farm," answered Steven, "is looking as any farm must look upon which nothing has been put, and out of which all has been taken during more than three years. The

message that Miss Dora wrote to me from you was a timely one, sir. The farm wanted my presence, and no mistake."

"Well, I had no reason to think any positive ill of Dawes," said the Squire; "still, when I saw the same field sowed with wheat for three successive years——"

"Dawes is a scoundrel," said Steven, quietly. "The land may have been over-cropped and under-manured through ignorance—*may*, I say; though I don't much believe in want of design even there. In actual hard cash the man has been robbing us for years. He robbed my uncle in his lifetime, young Josh in his, and me since young Josh's death."

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence, are you sure of this?" cried Katharine. "Are you sure that you are not judging him too hastily? I always think poor Dawes has such a good face!"

"And I have looked over his accounts, Miss Fane," said Steven, "and, poor scholar though I am, have proved him to be dishonest. It took me five hours to-day. I never reckoned so many figures in my life——"

"And the end of it was?" asked the Squire.

"My bidding Dawes leave the farm, and

show his face there no more; him, and all belonging to him."

"What!" cried Mr. Hilliard, "you gave him warning on the spot? A harsh measure, wasn't it, Lawrence? Ashcot has been his home for years."

"I gave him no warning at all, sir," said Steven. "I turned him out, him and his sons, and all that they claimed as belonging to them, into the road. Old Barbara and I will be the only inmates of Ashcot to-night."

"And you think this right, just?" cried Katharine, indignantly. "Allowing Dawes to have been ignorant—dishonest, even—you think it right to act like this? to turn a man who till this morning was counted honest out of your house like a common thief?"

"It is my idea of right," said Steven, humbly. "The life I have led has taught me that there's never any good in shilly-shallying when you've got to deal with a blackguard. If a man wrongs me I punish him, if I can, in hot blood, and in the hour when I find him out, and when I knowingly wrong any man, I shall expect to be treated the same. This is my idea of justice, and I couldn't go from it, although I'm quite ready to confess I may be wrong."

“And what will the Daweses do?” cried the Squire, taken aback at the idea of this sort of lynch law being imported into the parish. “Upon my word, Lawrence, I think you have been over-hasty. I hope you did not mention my name, now? Dawes is a man very well spoken of in the neighbourhood.”

“The better for him,” said Steven, shortly; “of course I didn’t mention your name, sir—the better for him that he is spoken well of. He will find work come quicker to his hand.”

“And what labour do you mean to take on the farm yourself, then?”

“As little as I can get along with,” answered Steven. “When I was a boy I remember that my uncle and myself, and a couple of lads, generally did the work pretty well, with extra hands of course at seed time and harvest. I don’t see why more labour should be wanted now than there was ten years ago.”

“Well, not of course if you mean to—”

“I mean,” said Steven, as a look from Katharine made the Squire hesitate, “to plough with my own hand and reap with my own arm as my father and grandfather did before me. There’s not much profit to be made by small farms at the best of times now-a-days; but, working as I shall work, Ash-

cot will yield me a fair living, and let me ride a good horse across country still. As much as I desire."

"Ah, you'll want one thing more, Lawrence," said the Squire, good-humouredly. "You'll want a wife—Kate, my dear, that's the fourth knob you have put in your mother's coffee—a smart little wife to keep your house in order for you. No good for a young fellow like you to talk of getting on steadily at farming or any other business without that, Lawrence."

Steven reddened, and in spite of himself his eyes sought Katharine's face.

"When I marry, sir," said he, "it will be because—because the woman I like will have me, not because the farm wants a mistress. As far as I can see, Barbara will keep house and mind the dairy for me for a good many years to come yet."

Dot had been sitting demurely in the bay-window while the others talked, looking, in her flowered summer dress and with a knot of ribbon and lace in her short hair, for all the world like a painted porcelain Marchioness (Dot always reminded you of some figure you had seen on Sèvres or Dresden). At Steven's last words she raised her big black eyes for a second to his; then, seeing

that he was not looking at her or thinking of her, turned her face away towards the window, and began, under her voice, to sing the refrain of one of those French ballads that mean so little in fact, and yet, sung with a certain sentiment, that may be made to mean so much !

“ A Sainte Blaize, à la Zuecca  
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise  
A Sainte Blaize ! ”

tapping with her small fingers on the glass as an accompaniment.

“ My dear Dora ! ” Mrs. Hilliard interposed in her softest, most injured tone, and opening her eyes, which had been shut ever since the Squire had diverted Steven’s attention from herself.

“ Yes, aunt Arabella ? ”

“ My poor head, Dora love ! Singing, or rather humming, always drives me to distraction, as you know.”

“ Oh, I beg a thousand pardons ! ” cried Dot, jumping up. “ Whenever I see the sun setting I feel I am out of doors, and whenever I am out of doors I feel I must sing ! Who will come out ? Will you, Katharine—will you, uncle Frank—when you have finished your coffee ? ”

The Squire was much too well broken in to his duties, somewhat too much afraid also of the effects of evening damp upon his own rheumatism, to leave the invalid alone. "Thank you, Dora my dear, I make it a rule never to stir out after dinner till the middle of the month—till it's dry enough, you know, Dot, for your poor aunt to go out with us. However, that's no reason you and Kate shouldn't take Lawrence for a walk about the place. He'll see it just as it always was, scarcely a tree altered, except perhaps the plantation beyond the rickyard. Kate, be sure you point out the young larches to him. I should like Lawrence's opinion as to the distance Macgregor has set them apart."

Dora tripped away into the passage for her garden-hat, a coquettish Watteau-like hat with knots of blue ribbon and broad shepherdess brim; Katharine, who never studied effect (of this kind), and was perfectly indifferent to evening dews or fresh breezes, opened the French window and walked out, bare-headed, into the sunset, with Steven following her.

"My dear," said the Squire to his wife a minute or two later, as he stood looking out upon the garden, his coffee-cup in his hand,

"do you know a very curious fancy has just come into my head?"

"Has it, Mr. Hilliard?"

"I shouldn't, of course, wish to hurt Dot's pride in any way, but it strikes me—well, it strikes me, Arabella, Master Lawrence is trying to pay his attentions to her. He was very anxious to turn it off, I remarked, when I joked him about getting a wife. Now what do you say?"

"What do you expect me to say, Frank?"

"Nay, my love, what do *you* think—what do you think?" said the Squire. "Of course I know you have had more experience in all these things than I have."

"What things, Mr. Hilliard?"

"Why, my dear, love and courtship, and—and all that!" cried the Squire, feeling that he had not hit upon a happy remark.

"Frank!" observed Mrs. Hilliard, opening her mild blue eyes very wide at him; "I see your attempt at sarcasm, but it does not wound me. I am past being wounded! May I ask you to ring for Williams?"

"Sarcasm! I will not ring for Williams; you know you never sleep when you go to bed so early—sarcasm! Merciful heaven, what did I say that could be called sarcasm?" cried the Squire, all contrition and humility.



"Did I ever in my life say or imagine an unkind word towards you? Now do, my poor child, be reasonable—I mean forgive me. I hadn't an idea of offending you, upon my soul I hadn't! You were very amiable to the young man at dinner, and as far as looks and manners go—"

"Mr. Hilliard," interrupted the invalid, "it's no use trying to turn it off like that. I wasn't thinking of Dot or of Steven Lawrence—who is not in the slightest degree attentive to her—but of what you said about my experience in love and courtship. If there is one man on earth who should be the last to taunt me with infidelity to my Richard's memory, that man is you."

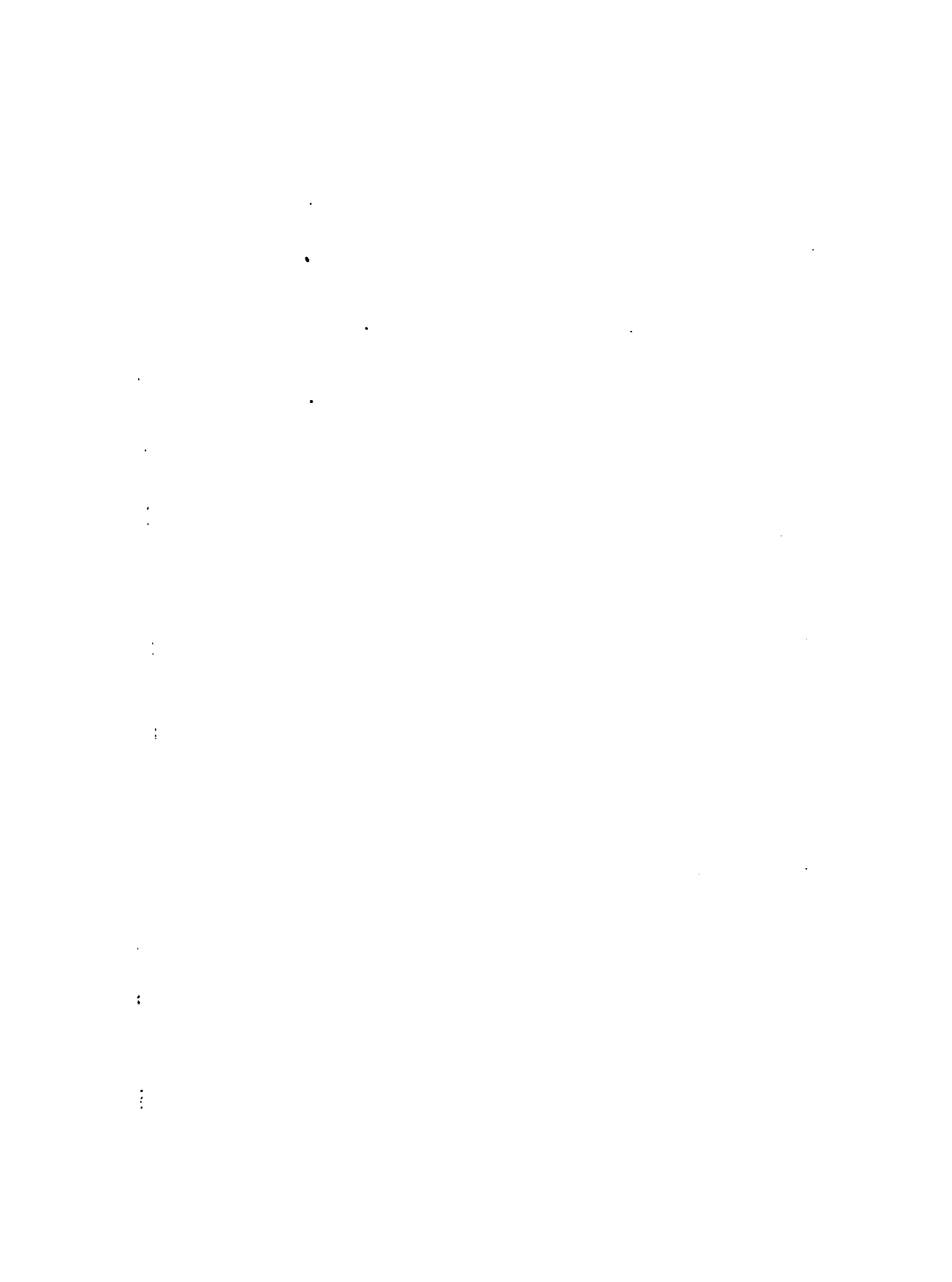
Which led on naturally to the poor little Squire's going through one of those daily scenes of recrimination from the lips of his angel, and confessions of cruelty from his own, that were the sentimental salt of Mrs. Hilliard's life; the only excitement she ever derived, except from novels. "I believe, indeed I know, I'm a fool in these things," he said, meekly, when peace was at last restored; "but still I do think it looks like it." Katharine, for some reason, had returned to the house; and Steven and Dora were to be seen standing somewhat close

together at a distant corner of the lawn. "And upon my word I should be very glad if it was so. Quite time the poor girl was comfortably settled in a home of her own. Now I wonder, Arabella, whether Lawrence knows she will have a thousand pounds on her wedding day?"

"It would be a delicate thing for you to tell him so, Mr. Hilliard—very delicate indeed. Dora is *my* dead Theodosia's child, and Steven Lawrence a peasant."

The poor Squire bit his lips to prevent getting into further trouble, and walked up and down the room, in the noiseless tiptoe fashion long habit had taught him, until the mild blue eyes of his angel were closed in earnest.

END OF VOL. I.





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